Chapter Five

EPIGRAMS ON WORKS OF ART

In the church of the Panagia Phorbiotissa at Asinou, on the island of Cyprus, a fresco that depicts the trial of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia freezing to death in an icy lake, bears the following verse inscription:

Χειμὼν τὸ λυποῦν, σὰρξ τὸ πάσχον ἐνθάδε·
προσσχὼν ἀκούσεις καὶ στεναγμὸν μαρτύρων·
εἰ δ᾽ οὐκ ἀκούσεις, καρτεροῦσι τὴν βίαν
πρὸς τὰ στέφη βλέποντες, οὐ πρὸς τοὺς πόνους[1].

"Winter it is that causes pain, flesh it is that suffers here. If you pay attention, you may even hear the groans of the martyrs; but if you do not listen, they will still endure the violent cold, looking to their crowns and not to their toils".

The fresco (along with other murals) was donated to the church at Asinou by a local official, Nikephoros Magistros, in the year 1105–06. The text he had inscribed on it, however, is considerably older than the fresco itself, for it is an epigram by the late tenth-century poet John Geometres, which can be found in many manuscripts[2]. Although the epigram was not written especially for this particular image of the Forty Martyrs, it "is certainly very appropriate to the image at Asinou, for the fresco graphically shows the suffering flesh of the martyrs, who hug themselves for warmth. One of the martyrs, depicted third from the left in the second row from the top, even covers his mouth with his hand, as if to stifle the groans that are mentioned in the poem. At the same time, two of the martyrs at the top point upwards, as if, in the words of the last verse, they were looking to their crowns and not to their toils"[3]. The fact that Geometres' epigram is found on a much later fresco at Asinou may perhaps

[1] Ed. W.H. Buckler, *Archaeologia* 83 (1933) 340, M. Sacopoulou, Asinou en 1106 et sa contribution à l' iconographie. Brussels 1966, 56, and H. Maguire, *DOP* 31 (1977) 152, n. 156. The text printed here is that of Sajdak's edition (see following footnote); the inscription is illegible at certain spots and presents a rather garbled version of the epigram: τῇ βίᾳ (v. 3) and βλέπουσιν (v. 4).

[2] Ed. Sternbach 1897: 157, and Sajdak 1929: 197 (no. S. 8). See below, Appendix II, pp. 298–299.

[3] Maguire 1996: 12.

seem somewhat surprising, but this sort of second-hand use of epigrams is not without parallel in Byzantium[4]. However, the problem is that we hardly ever know by which devious paths an epigram may unexpectedly turn up centuries later as a verse inscription. As for the verse inscription in the Panagia Phorbiotissa, there are basically two possible avenues of transmission. Either Nikephoros Magistros, thumbing through his copy of Geometres' collection of poems, spotted a suitable literary epigram on the Forty Martyrs and copied it, or alternatively, he derived the epigram from a specific late tenth-century work of art, for which Geometres had been commissioned to write an appropriate caption and which served as the direct model for the fresco at Asinou. Neither of these two possibilities can be ruled out; but as evidence is lacking, neither of the two can be proved beyond any reasonable doubt.

Byzantine anthologies and poetry books contain thousands of epigrams on well-known pictorial scenes, such as David and Goliath, the Annunciation, the Koimesis, the Forty Martyrs, and so forth. In marked contrast to the abundance of manuscript material, the number of epigrams actually found on Byzantine works of art is rather limited[5]. In Appendix VIII, where I enumerate the verse inscriptions on works of art, the patient reader will find 83 entries only; since some of the works of art bear more than one verse inscription, the number of epigrams amounts to a total of 122. If one closely examines the epigraphic material, one immediately notices that almost all inscriptions are found either on stone or on luxury objects. This is only to be expected. Inscriptions on stone do not easily wear out and luxury objects (such as ivories, reliquaries and illustrated manuscripts) are too precious to be handled without care and to disappear into the careless wastebasket of time. In contrast, the number of verse inscriptions on mosaics, frescoes and paintings is limited because these are basically perishable materials, and thus the chances of survival to the present day are fairly low. Furthermore, as the Muslim world objects to religious images, the Ottoman Turks understandably (at least from their viewpoint) ruined most of the Byzantine monuments in Istanbul. This iconoclastic enterprise was particularly damaging to mosaics and frescoes, which were either whitewashed or destroyed altogether. In the secluded province of Cappadocia, where most of the rock-cut churches and monasteries have survived, many murals can still be found. But what if these murals and the inscriptions on them had disappeared, as happened in other parts of the Ottoman Empire? And vice versa, would our view on Byzantine epigraphy not have been different if medieval Constantinople had turned into Ottoman Istanbul without significant damage to the monuments?

[4] See above, chapter 1, p. 31, and see Hörandner 1987: 237–238.
[5] See Mango 1991: 239–240.

The majority of Byzantine verse inscriptions on works of art are dedicatory texts in which the donor presents his pious oblation to Christ, the Holy Virgin, or one of the many saints, and prays that his munificence may be rewarded in the hereafter. The material evidence once again presents a somewhat distorted image of the kinds of epigrams that were inscribed on Byzantine monuments and artefacts. Luxury objects and expensive buildings bear the name of their pious donors for an obvious reason: if a person spends a fortune hoping to obtain spiritual salvation, he understandably wants people to know who paid for the expenses (just like modern sponsors usually demand that the scientific programme they are funding, the sports event they are sponsoring or the public building they are financing bears their name). Dedicatory inscriptions are inscribed on stone or other sorts of material that do not wear out easily, such as ivory or precious metals. Epigrams that describe a specific work of art, on the contrary, are usually inscribed on mosaics, frescoes and icons – materials that do not last as long as stone. It is precisely because of this material aspect that descriptive inscriptions are rare, whereas there are dozens of dedicatory inscriptions[6]. However, the manuscripts, and especially the lemmata attached to the poems, leave no doubt that Byzantine works of art were often inscribed with descriptive epigrams. Most of these works of art and their inscriptions have disappeared, but the texts found in manuscripts may help us in recapturing the past and reshaping in our minds the visual world of the Byzantines. And this is precisely why art historians should pay special attention to epigrams[7]. For the epigrams that we find in Byzantine manuscripts, may fill in some of the formidable lacunae in the epigraphic material, and may occasionally provide evidence for monuments that have been lost.

I certainly do not mean to suggest that all the epigrams on works of art we find in Byzantine collections of poems and anthologies were once intended to be inscribed. There are simply too many epigrams and too few monuments. In my view, the majority of epigrams on works of art should not be regarded as genuine verse inscriptions, which by some unlucky quirk of fate can no longer be found *in situ*, but rather as purely literary poems. However, as the "literary" epigrams closely resemble the "inscriptional" ones, usually it is almost impossible to establish whether an epigram was originally meant to be inscribed or not. Lemmata may provide some circumstantial evidence, and words like βλέπω and ἐνθάδε may indicate that an epigram describes a specific work of art (see, for instance, the first verse of Geometres' epigram: "Winter it is that causes pain, flesh it is that suffers *here*"). But if an epigram is not

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[6] See also Talbot 1999: 89.

[7] See C. Mango, The Art of the Byzantine Empire (312–1453). Sources and Documents. Englewood Cliffs 1972, 182.

equipped with a lemma noting its provenance and does not contain any internal clues, such as verbs of perception and adverbs of place, we do not know whether it is an original verse inscription or simply a literary response to the visual message of an image or iconographic type. And even if an epigram expressly tells us to look at a particular scene and imagine the awesome mysteries revealed in it, we cannot be absolutely certain that we are dealing with a genuine verse inscription rather than with a literary text that makes clever use of the usual *topoi* of the genre. For this is what it is: a genre in its own right and with its own formal characteristics – a kind of poetry that aims to express forms of visual imagination and to render in words mental perceptions of the visible[8].

This genre I call *epigrams on works of art*. Since we often do not know whether an epigram on a work of art served as a verse inscription or not, the term I have chosen is deliberately vague, indicating either an epigram that was actually inscribed *on* a specific work of art or a literary poem *on* the subject of a certain Byzantine iconographic type. The term is perfectly Byzantine. For in manuscripts the usual heading attached to an epigram on a work of art is simply: εἰς … (εἰς τὴν ἀνάστασιν, εἰς τὸν Θωμᾶν, εἰς τοὺς μ′ μάρτυρας, etc.). The meaning of the preposition εἰς is ambiguous: it either indicates the subject matter or the object on which the epigram is to be found[9]. For instance, the lemma εἰς τὴν ἀνάστασιν can be interpreted in two totally different ways: the epigram deals with the subject of the Resurrection of Christ or the epigram is inscribed on a picture of the Anastasis. As for the two other terms of my definition, *epigram* and *work of art*, I have to confess that neither of the two is specifically Byzantine. As stated in chapter 1 (pp. 27–30), the term ἐπίγραμμα is not much in evidence in Byzantine manuscripts, but when the word is used, it indicates a close relation between an epigram and the specific object on which it is found. The generic term "work of art" is never used because Byzantine lemmatists always specify what the subject of a given epigram is.

In various scholarly publications, the Byzantine epigrams on works of art are labelled differently. They are either called "epideictic epigrams"[10] or "ec-

[8] For epigrams on works of art in Latin, see A. Arnulf, Versus ad picturas. Studien zur Titulusdichtung als Quellengattung der Kunstgeschichte von der Antike bis zum Hochmittelalter. Berlin 1997. See also C.B. Kendall, The Allegory of the Church: Romanesque Portals and their Verse Inscriptions. Toronto 1998.

[9] See Speck 1968: 66–67. Cf. the lemmata attached to *AP* I, 109–114: *εἰς* τὸν ναόν etc., *εἰς* τὸν αὐτόν, *ἐν* τῷ αὐτῷ ναῷ, *εἰς* τὸν αὐτὸν ναόν, *ἐν* τῷ αὐτῷ ναῷ and *ἐν* τῷ αὐτῷ ναῷ: here εἰς and ἐν mean exactly the same thing, namely that the epigrams were inscribed *in* the church of the Source.

[10] See, for instance, Galli Calderini 1987: 119–123 and Kambylis 1994–95: 28 and 31.

phrastic epigrams"[11]. Both terms are incorrect. The error results from blindly relying on the classification system that modern editions adopt in presenting the epigrams of the Greek Anthology. These editions basically present the epigrams in the same order as they are found in the Palatine manuscript, and ignore the textual evidence of other sources. The problem here is that scribes B, who copied the second part of the anthology of Cephalas, made use of a manuscript that had a serious lacuna between *AP* IX, 583 and 584. Fortunately, with the help of the *Planudean Anthology* and the so-called *syllogae minores*, we can reconstruct what this part of the anthology of Cephalas originally looked like. Originally there were two separate books: (IXa) epideictic epigrams (*AP* IX, 1–583) and (IXb) epigrams on works of art (*APl* 32–387 + a number of epigrams found in the *syllogae minores* + *AP* IX, 584–822)[12]. As the two books were clearly separated in the original Cephalas, it is obviously incorrect to label the epigrams on works of art "epideictic", for the term "epideictic epigram" only refers to *AP* IXa (nos. 1–583), and not to *AP* IXb where the epigrams on works of art are found. Since the Cephalan title and prooemium to the book of epigrams on works of art are missing in the Palatine manuscript (because of the lacuna in the exemplar that the scribes used), we do not know which term Cephalas used for these epigrams. But it is highly unlikely that he would have labelled the epigrams on works of art "ecphrastic". First of all, none of the Byzantine sources use this term. In his anthology Planudes introduces the epigrams as follows: "this fourth book, containing the epigrams on statues of gods and men, pictures of animals and sites, is divided into the following sections: images of honourable men, etc.". Although Planudes was one of the leading rhetoricians of his time, he does not employ the technical term "ekphrasis" for this kind of epigrammatic poetry, but rather vaguely refers to ἐπιγράμματα εἰς … Secondly, the rhetorical exercise of ἔκφρασις is not a plain description of art, as many people appear to think, but involves much more. In the second volume of this book the formal aspects of literary ekphraseis in verse will be discussed. One of these aspects is the sheer length of such poems as a result of the large-scale development of ecphrastic themes in terms of emotional depth and narrative width. As epigrams on works of art are usually quite short, they only rarely display this sort of rhetorical elaboration[13].

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[11] The term is used by many scholars. I regret to say that I, too, adopted this term in my dissertation: The Byzantine Epigram in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries. Amsterdam 1994, 21–70.

[12] See Lauxtermann 1998c: 526–527. See also chapter 3, pp. 85–86.

[13] See Lauxtermann 1998c: 528–529.

Two Epigrams from the Greek Anthology

The anthology of Cephalas, especially its first book (*AP* I), contains many Byzantine epigrams that are of great art-historical interest. Here I shall discuss two little-known texts which can be found in IXb, the Cephalan book of epigrams on works of art: namely, *AP* IX, 818 and IX, 815.

AP IX, 818 is one of a series of three dedicatory epigrams (IX, 817–819) celebrating the donation of liturgical objects by a certain Peter to a church that probably adjoined the hospice of Euboulos[14]. The first of these three epigrams was written on an altar cloth embroidered with pictures of martyrs[15]. The second and third ones were inscribed on a *diskopoterion* (paten and chalice), probably made of silver or gilded metal. The epigrams probably date from the early seventh century, seeing that they follow the Pisidian rules of versification. The epigrams are written in prosodic dodecasyllables, with an obligatory stress accent on the penultimate; but IX, 819. 2 has a resolution in the first metrical position. The text of IX, 818 runs as follows:

Καὶ Πέτρος ἄλλος τὸν τάφον τοῦ Κυρίου
τὸν ζωοποιὸν εἰσιδεῖν μὴ συμφθάσας
ἔγλυψα δίσκον, μνήματος θείου τύπον,
ἐν ᾧ τὸ Χριστοῦ σῶμα κύψας προσβλέπω.

"I, another Peter, not having arrived in time to behold the life-giving tomb of the Lord, engraved this paten, a symbol of the holy sepulchre, in which, bowing down, I see the body of Christ". Peter the donor compares himself to Peter the apostle: just as the apostle could not keep up with his companion and arrived with some delay only to find the grave empty (Joh. 20: 3–9), so the donor was not able to see the holy sepulchre in Jerusalem with his own eyes. In order to compensate for the missed opportunity of going on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Peter produced this paten, which, although not the real thing, may be viewed in a symbolic sense as a representation of the holy sepulchre because the Eucharist, once it is consecrated, turns into the body of Christ itself. The meaning of the word κύψας is deliberately ambiguous. It not only denotes the priestly gesture of bowing the head and the upper part of the body as a sign of reverence to the mystery of Christ's transubstantiation, but it is also an

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[14] *AP* IX, 816 is a late antique epigram on a μινσώριον (*missorium*, platter) τῶν Εὐβούλων (on this hospice, see Malalas, 411, Chronicon Paschale, 622 and Theophanes, 165). The lemmata attached to *AP* IX, 817–819 possibly indicate that the three objects were also found in the hospice: 817 εἰς ἐνδύτην *ἑαυτοῦ* (sic), 818 εἰς δίσκον ἄλλον *ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ* and 819 εἰς ποτήριον *ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ*. See also P. Waltz, *REG* 58 (1945) 105–117.

[15] The epigram is not mentioned in P. Speck's two lists of *endytai*: *JÖBG* 15 (1966) 323–375, and Varia II (*Ποικίλα Βυζαντινά* 6). Bonn 1987, 331–337.

oblique reference to the Gospel text stating that the Apostle Peter, when he arrived at the tomb, bent over (προσκύψας) to look inside. However, whereas the apostle did not find the body of Christ there, Peter can actually see it, right in front of him, in the form of consecrated bread. Though he was born too late to be a disciple himself and witness the godly presence of Christ, he outdoes his namesake in a certain sense, for he is able to see what the apostle could not: the body of Christ in the holy sepulchre. By paying much money for what was undoubtedly an expensive object[16], and by having it engraved with his own dedicatory inscription, the paten and also the Eucharist itself become his – at least in a symbolic sense. He is there to witness the Resurrection of Christ, he takes part in it every time the Eucharist is celebrated. His personal involvement in the enacting of this divine mystery also explains why the text of this epigram, in contrast to most verse inscriptions, makes use of the first person. It also accounts for the somewhat tautological statement: "I, another Peter, (…) engraved this paten" – tautological, of course, because the text he had engraved is the epigram itself. What Peter is actually saying is that the donation of the paten establishes a sort of personal pact between himself and Christ. By his pious oblation Peter somehow turns into one of the disciples who witnessed the earthly presence of the Lord. His reward for donating this paten is being there, at the holy sepulchre which he never visited in person, to peer inside and look at the body of Christ.

The second epigram to be discussed is *AP* IX, 815. As the number already indicates, it can be found immediately before the epigrams Peter had inscribed on the liturgical objects that he donated to a church. The text reads as follows:

Ξεῖνε, τί νῦν σπεύδεις ὁρόων ἀκεσώδυνον ὕδωρ;
εὐφροσύνης τὸ λοετρόν· ἀπορρύπτει μελεδώνας,
μόχθον ἐλαφρίζει· τόδε γὰρ ποίησε Μιχαήλ,
ὃς κρατερῆς βασιληίδος αὐλῆς ἡγεμονεύει.

"Stranger, what is the rush now when you have the water that cures pain nearby? This is the bath of joy; it washes away sorrows, it lightens labour. It was built by Michael, who is in command of the mighty imperial court". The epigram is written in elegant hexameters and since the versification is almost Nonnian (see also the tell-tale compound adjective ἀκεσώδυνος), it is usually dated to the fifth or the sixth century[17]. As the use of hexameters κατὰ στίχον, instead of elegiacs, is fairly normal in late antique inscriptions[18], nothing would

[16] For a comparable object bearing an inscription, see, for instance, the *diskopoterion* commissioned by Basil the Nothos and now to be found in the treasury of St. Mark's in Venice: Guillou 1996: nos. 74–75 and plates 71–73.
[17] See, for instance, Keydell 1962: 561.
[18] See Wifstrand 1933: 155–177.

seem to contradict this dating. However, the medial caesura in the fourth verse (a metrical phenomenon typical of Byzantine poetry) certainly does not support the traditional dating. This is why most modern editors emendate the verse and print: (…) αὐλῆς βασιληίδος (…). But, one might ask, is this emendation justified? Is this really a late antique verse inscription? Let us look at the text. Firstly, one may notice that the epigram stresses the curative powers of the bath Michael had built: it "cures pain", "washes away sorrows" and "lightens labour". Late antique epigrams (see, for instance, *AP* IX, 606–640) rarely state that going to a public bath is a hygienic necessity. Of course, the ancients knew perfectly well that lack of personal hygiene is detrimental to health, but they viewed bathing above all as a pleasant social event. The Byzantines did not see it that way. Since nudity was held to be disgraceful, taking a bath was only done to avoid getting ill[19]. It is for this reason that Byzantine epigrams on the subject of bathing invariably stress that it is good for one's health[20]. Secondly, the word εὐφροσύνη in the second verse is rather peculiar. In ancient and late antique epigrams the key-word is χάρις, indicating both "grace" and "favour". The public bath is a graceful, delightfully structured building adorned with statues and mosaics, which the city could afford thanks to the munificence of an illustrious citizen[21]. It is a χάρις. It is not a χαρά, however much the ancients enjoyed taking a bath. The word "joy" (εὐφροσύνη, χαρά and other synonyms) appears to belong to the Byzantine vocabulary for balneary experiences. In Chr. Mityl. 53, for instance, the poet first sums up the therapeutic properties of baths and then concludes by saying that "when you come to think of it, taking a bath also produces joy, for nature itself truly takes pleasure in clean bodies". Thirdly, the fourth verse poses a serious problem. Who exactly "is in command of the imperial court"? The magister officiorum? The master of ceremonies? Possibly, but since late antique and Byzantine epigrams never omit to stress that magistrates owe their high position to the benevolence of the reigning emperor, it looks like a gross insult to the emperor to bluntly state that these officials are "in command of the imperial court". Let us look at the text once again. What if we printed the unusual word εὐφροσύνης with a capital E and then translated likewise: "This is the bath of Euphrosyne"? Then all the pieces of the puzzle would fall into place. The Michael who built this public bath is Emperor Michael II (821–829), who was married to a lady called Euphrosyne in c. 823–824. Seeing that the epigram treats the subject of bathing in a truly Byzantine manner, and in light

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19 See A. Berger, Das Bad in der byzantinischen Zeit. Munich 1982.

20 See, for instance, the poem published by Westerink 1992: 427–428 (no. 60).

21 See *AP* IX, 606–640; Robert 1948: 78–81; and S. Busch, Versus Balnearum. Leipzig–Stuttgart 1999.

of the typically Byzantine metrical 'error' in the fourth verse (the medial caesura), a ninth-century date perfectly squares with the facts[22]. And the fact that the epigram is composed in almost flawless hexameters, should be viewed from the perspective of the fashionable classicistic vogue of the ninth century. The substitution of the name Εὐφροσύνη for the key-word χάρις is also the sort of double entendre the Byzantines were particularly fond of, because Euphrosyne is not only the name of the wife of Michael II, but also that of one of the three Graces, the famous Χάριτες holding hands while they dance.

Thus, by carefully reading the text of two epigrams found in the anthology of Cephalas, we may reconstruct their original setting: their place in time. We also may see the differences between private donations and public buildings. The bath that Michael II had built and that bore the name of his wife must have been a public one, for the "stranger" who passes by[23], can see the bath right in front of him; he only has to stop on his way through Constantinople, look at the building and read the dedicatory inscription. The paten Peter commissioned, however, could only be seen by the few members of the clergy, who celebrated Mass in the church where the paten was stored. One of the few people who could see the object and its inscription, was Peter himself; he had only to bend over when the Eucharist was celebrated, and look at his own verse inscription. The epigram on the bath of Euphrosyne addresses all those who can read, and emphatically states that taking a bath serves public health. The epigram on the paten, however, stresses that Peter is the person who paid for it and in return received the unique favour of witnessing the body of Christ. The former epigram is a public message, the latter a personal statement of faith.

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[22] R.C. McCail, *JHSt* 89 (1969) 94, too, dates the epigram to the early ninth century, but without providing any arguments. Incidentally, the scribal 'error' by scribe B of the Palatine manuscript, Μισαήλ (sic) instead of Μιχαήλ, appears to indicate that the scribe, too, identified Michael with Michael II and made a typically Byzantine pun by changing the name of this iconoclast emperor, Μιχαήλ ("he who is like God"), into Μισαήλ ("he whom God hates" or "he who hates God").

[23] For the literary *topos* of the stranger passing by and looking at a public building, see, for instance, two late antique verse inscriptions: *AP* IX, 686 and 787.

Dedicatory Epigrams

As there are many dedicatory epigrams, a few specimens only must suffice here. I shall begin with an epigram by John Geometres (Cr. 319, 6–9):

Τὴν παρθένον καὶ σῶμα καὶ τὴν καρδίαν
ὁ σῶμα καὶ νοῦν τοῖς πόνοις ἐφθαρμένος
Ἰωάννης ἔγραψεν ἄμφω ῥωννύειν.
χρυσός, λίθοι γῆς· ἡ δὲ τέχνη σοῦ, Λόγε.

"His body and spirit worn out by hardships, John depicted her who is immaculate in body and soul, so as to regain his health and good spirits. Gold and stones belong to the earth, but the art is thine, O Word". The donor is probably John Geometres himself since in many poems written at the end of his life, the poet complains about his bad health[24]. In 985–986 Geometres was forced by order of Basil II to abandon active service in the military. Infuriated because of the injustice done to him, but also secretly hoping to regain his former position, the poet wrote many poems against his opponents at the court, in which he ventilates his anger in bitter words and repeatedly states that he is suffering, both physically and mentally, from the envy of others[25]. The last verse of the epigram reveals to us what the portrait of the Theotokos he had donated was made of: χρυσός and λίθοι, gold and stones – in other words, a mosaic with the Virgin in full colour and the background glittering with golden tesserae. He had this mosaic made in the hope of regaining his health. In the epigram Geometres cleverly contrasts the immaculate nature of the Holy Virgin with his own afflictions: whereas she is not affected by any form of corruption and decay, he is a sinner subjected to the corroding effects of our earthly existence. However, by using the passive voice (ἐφθαρμένος) and indicating the agent (τοῖς πόνοις), he distances himself in a certain sense from the corruption of body and soul he confesses to have fallen prey to. It was not really his fault; if only circumstances had been different, he would not have committed sinful acts and his health would not have suffered. He donates the mosaic to the Holy Virgin because she is the mother of Christ, who is mentioned in the last verse: being so close to the Word Incarnate, she must surely be able to mediate on behalf of Geometres and explain to her Son that he does not deserve to suffer as much as he does. The invocation of the *Logos* in the last verse also serves to strengthen the appeal by referring back to the epigram itself. Geometres donates a mosaic depicting the Theotokos, but the *logos* inscribed on it, the epigram, makes clear how this particular mosaic should be

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[24] See Cr. 287, 17–18; 292, 2; 295, 23–28; 336, 28–31; 338, 30 – 339, 22; and 351, 8–11.
[25] See Lauxtermann 1998d: 367–373.

interpreted. "The art is thine, O Word". Images need words. The mosaic is adorned with a verse inscription because that is the best way to ensure that the Divine Word listens to Geometres' plea, which is not only visualized in art, but also expressed in poetic words.

It is worth noticing that Geometres uses the active voice (ἔγραψε) to indicate his role in the manufacturing of the mosaic that he commissioned. As it is out of the question that an army officer, such as Geometres, had the technical ability to make a mosaic, the verb does not mean that he himself produced the mosaic, but that he ordered artists to make it and paid for the costs. This would seem obvious enough, but regrettably many scholars confuse donors and painters because Byzantine epigrams and verse inscriptions do not distinguish between "having something made" and "making something"[26]. The active voice ("he/she painted", "he/she built", etc.) nearly always indicates that the person who is said to have made a work of art, made it possible by providing the money for it. There are very few exceptions to this rule. For instance, there is an epigram that tells us that Thomas the Painter donated an ὑελουργία to the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in the early ninth century[27]. Since he is called a ζωγράφος, it is reasonable to assume that he himself made the work of glass (either a mosaic or an enamel[28]).

Since we have very little information, other than the works of art and the inscriptions themselves, on the way artefacts were manufactured in Byzantium, it is impossible to establish precisely what the act of commissioning a work of art actually entailed, and what the initial stage of production was like. Say that a donor ordered a portrait of St. Nicholas: did he just place his order and then leave the atelier, or did he give detailed instructions to the artist telling him what the portrait should be like and what its pictorial message should be? This is something we do not know. The term "patronage" should therefore be used with extreme caution. If the term simply indicates that a specific donor

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[26] See, for instance, N. Oikonomides, in: Artistes, artisans et production artistique au moyen âge. Paris 1986, 47–48 (repr. in: idem, Byzantium from the Ninth Century to the Fourth Crusade. London 1992, no. XI), who attributes the painting of an icon to Emperor Romanos Argyros. In fact, Romanos Argyros is not the famous emperor, the icon is not painted but in mosaic, and the donor did not produce the mosaic himself, but commissioned it. For the epigrams on the mosaics in the Argyros monastery and their donor, see pp. 184–186 and 323.

[27] See A. Frolow, *Bulletin des Études Orientales de l'Institut Français de Damas* 11 (1945–46) 121–130 and E. Follieri, *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Rendiconti* 371 (1974) 1–21.

[28] It is difficult to understand what the Byzantines mean exactly when they say that a work of art is made of glass. See, for instance, Geometres, Cr. 301, 1–8, where he describes a picture of the archangels in glass: is this a mosaic of glass cubes, an enamel or a window of stained glass?

commissioned a work of art and paid for it, there is nothing wrong with it. However, if it implies that the donor is to be credited with the invention of refined iconographic programmes (in the mould of Renaissance maecenatism), the term would be misleading. Dedicatory epigrams may provide useful information on the donor's intentions and motives, but they do not tell us much about the actual work of art. Thus it is a grave error to assume that we can reconstruct the appearance of a lost work of art simply by reading what the accompanying epigram has to say. Works of art and epigrams constitute two autonomous forms of imagination. They respond to each other, but they speak in different tongues. Let us look again at the epigram of John Geometres. The epigram tells us what the picture of the Holy Virgin that Geometres donated was made of: "gold" and "stones", and we understand that it must have been a mosaic depicting the Theotokos against a golden background, such as we find in many Byzantine churches. The epigram also discloses what Geometres' motives for donating this particular image had been: he was suffering from bad health and hoped that the Holy Virgin could provide a cure. But what the epigram regrettably does not tell us is what the image looked like. Was her face slightly turned away, or directed towards the viewer? Was she looking at him with a stern expression? Was she smiling gently, perhaps even with an air of complacency? Or did her eyes express a feeling of sorrow and compassion with fallen mankind? Even if we knew the answers to these questions, the epigram by Geometres would still tell us only what he read, or hoped to read, in the picture that he had paid for. It would express his own emotions toward the Theotokos, not the emotions that the artist rendered visible in the mosaic. It would reveal to us how he looked at the picture, but not how the picture looked at him. Epigrams often do not describe the actual mosaic or painting, but rather elaborate on the holy figure depicted. Epigrams on pictures of the Theotokos, for instance, usually do not pretend to comment upon the images themselves, but rather treat the Holy Virgin's role in the salvation of mankind. Although we would expect that the mosaic donated by Geometres showed the Holy Virgin with a sorrowful expression on her face as a sign of compassionate understanding, she may have faced the sinful world with a look of austerity or have stared down at us with a Mona Lisa-like smile. Pictures and epigrams do not necessarily correspond. Epigrams are important as textual evidence inasmuch as they tell us how poets responded to the visual arts, but what epigrams do not reveal is the actual appearance of the images they describe.

Dedicatory verse inscriptions can be divided into two categories: texts on public buildings and texts on churches, monasteries and religious works of art[29].

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[29] On dedicatory inscriptions, see A. and J. Stylianou, *JÖBG* 9 (1960) 97–128; P. Asemakopoulou-Atzaka, in: Ἁρμός. Τιμητικὸς τόμος στὸν καθηγητὴ Ν.Κ. Μουτσόπουλο. Thessalonica 1990, I, 227–267; S. Kalopissi-Verti, Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor

The first category is regrettably small in number, the second extremely popular. Epigrams and verse inscriptions on public buildings mention the donor (usually the emperor, occasionally a high-powered official) and the public building or construction that he had made: a city-wall, a bathhouse, a bridge, a fortress, and so forth[30]. The recipient of the donation is usually not mentioned, but in the rare cases that an epigram does mention the beneficiary, it invariably turns out to be the city population at large. For instance, in the elegant verse inscription that commemorates the construction of the walls of Ankyra by Michael III in 859, the city itself is directly addressed and urged to cooperate with the emperor in his efforts to restore it to its former beauty[31]. Likewise, in epigrams that omit to mention who exactly benefits from the imperial donation, there can be little doubt that the public building or construction is presented to the people for the common good. The real absentee in inscriptions on public buildings is God Almighty. Whereas dedicatory epigrams on churches and icons invariably invoke God or one of His divine representatives, the donor of public buildings does not require His help. God is mentioned only rarely, and then in a rather casual and perfunctory manner, as a reminder that the public building the emperor presents to the population at large has God's blessing.

In all other Byzantine dedications, however, God is omnipresent as the ultimate authority in matters of the soul. To make his voice heard, the donor needs a divine intermediary who will intercede on his behalf. As he cannot approach God directly, the donor makes use of a middleman (or a 'middlewoman': the popular Theotokos or one of the many female saints) to ensure that his plea will be heard at the divine court[32]. In the epigram treated above, for instance, Geometres addresses the Holy Virgin in the hope that she will present his plea for salvation up above, where the real decisions are made. In fact, in most dedicatory epigrams God is not mentioned by name, but is only implicitly referred to. God is the supreme judge presiding in heaven, far from ordinary people. Fortunately, however, He is inclined to listen to the pleas of those who are closest to Him: His immaculate Mother above all, but also the celestial host of angels, apostles, martyrs and saints. Thus the patronage of the arts paradoxically entails another sort of patronage: a divine clientele system in which the donor needs patron saints to intervene on his behalf.

Portraits in Thirteenth-Century Churches of Greece. Vienna 1992; and G. Subotis and I. Tot, *ZRVI* 36 (1997) 99–108.

[30] For verse inscriptions on public buildings, see Appendix VIII, nos. 20–42.

[31] Ed. Grégoire 1927–28: 439.

[32] See N. Patterson Ševčenko, in: Byzance et les images, ed. A. Guillou & J. Durand. Paris 1994, 255–285.

The smallest artefacts on which verse inscriptions can be found are lead seals[33]. The texts usually consist of one or two verses; quatrains appear on a few lead seals dating from the Comnenian age and the late Byzantine period[34]. Metrical seals make use of the dodecasyllable[35]. The texts are cliched and embroider on standard formulae, such as γραφὰς σφραγίζω or Θεοτόκε βοήθει, the only fanciful element being the Byzantine gusto for puns and wordplay[36]. Early Byzantine lead seals only bear the name and title of their owners. In the late tenth century, family names start to appear, and in the Comnenian age, there is a clear tendency to increasingly mention aristocratic affiliations. Due to these changes in the official nomenclature, the length of verse inscriptions gradually expands and monostichs eventually evolve into distichs. It is difficult to establish exactly when inscriptions in metre (instead of prose) became fashionable in Byzantium. The eleventh-century date that Laurent proposed in his seminal book "*Les bulles métriques*"[37] is certainly too late, but it is not entirely clear whether the popularity of metrical seals started in the tenth century or at some earlier date. Seals usually carry representations of Christ, the Theotokos, apostles, martyrs and saints – holy figures to whom the owner of the seal prays for salvation. See, for instance, the following verse inscription: Κρήτης πρόεδρον, Χριστέ, σῴζοις 'Ανδρέαν ("Christ, save Andrew, Bishop of Crete"). This lead seal has been attributed to the famous eighth-century hymnographer, Andrew of Crete; if the identification is correct, it would be the oldest metrical seal known to us[38].

Given the fact that the works of art currently on display in museums, private collections and libraries form just a small, and perhaps not even representative, selection of Byzantine art, the number of luxury objects commissioned by Basil the Nothos is truly exceptional. Basil's donations include

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[33] There are also a few ceremonial coins that bear verse inscriptions: for instance, Δέσποινα σῴζοις εὐσεβῆ Μονομάχον (Const. IX), ed. Ph. Grierson, Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection, vol. III. Washington, D.C., 1973, 745–746.

[34] See M. Marcovich, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 14 (1974) 171–173.

[35] See H. Hunger, *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 2 (1990) 27–37. Recent attempts to discover the political verse and other metres on metrical seals (see, for instance, E. McGeer, *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 4 (1995) 63–69) are hardly convincing: the combination of standard formulae and family names may produce discordant 'metrical' patterns, but these 'metres' are purely coincidental.

[36] See H. Hunger, Die metrischen Siegellegenden der Byzantiner. Vienna 1988 (Sonderausgabe aus dem Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 125. Jahrgang).

[37] V. Laurent, Les bulles métriques dans la sigillographie byzantine. Athens 1932.

[38] Ed. V. Laurent, Le corpus des sceaux de l' Empire Byzantin, V. Paris 1963, no. 619, and G. Zacos & A. Veglery, Byzantine Lead Seals, vol. I. Basel 1972, no. 1293.

the following: a reliquary of the head of Symeon the Stylite, a reliquary of the head of St. Stephen, a *diskopoterion*, the precious staurotheca of Limburg an-der-Lahn, the manuscript of the *Naumachika* and two other splendid manuscripts (Epistles of St. Paul and Homilies of St. John Chrysostom) as well as the monastery of St. Basil in Constantinople[39]. The text of the verse inscription on the reliquary of St. Stephen's head (now lost, but still extant in the seventeenth century in a Franciscan monastery on Crete) reads as follows:

Τὴν σὴν κάραν, πρώταθλε, μαρτύρων κλέος,
ἣν μαρτυρικοὶ πρὶν κατέστεψαν λίθοι,
στέφω κἀγὼ νῦν ἐξ ὕλης χρυσαργύρου
δώρῳ πενιχρῷ δεικνὺς ὄλβιον πόθον,
οὗ χάριν αἰτῶ τῆς ψυχῆς σωτηρίαν,
ὁ βασιλικὸς σὸς Βασίλειος, μάκαρ,
γαμβρὸς κρατοῦντος καὶ βαΐουλος μέγας
καὶ παρακοιμώμενος ἐκ τῆς ἀξίας.

"O champion and glory of the martyrs, your head, which the stones of martyrdom once crowned, I too now crown with the material of gold and silver, thus showing my lavish devotion with a humble gift, in reward for which I request the salvation of my soul, I the imperial servant, who am the brother-in-law of the emperor and the *megas baioulos* and hold the office of *parakoimomenos*, I your Basil, O Saint"[40].

Basil the Nothos was the brother-in-law of Emperor Constantine VII, served as his *parakoimomenos* and was officially the tutor of Romanos II (*megas baioulos*, an honorary title). The precise course of Basil's career in the imperial administration between 945 and 959, the years of the sole reign of Constantine VII, is not entirely clear[41], but it does not really matter for the present purpose. Far more important than the precise date of the epigram is what the poet explicitly and implicitly states about Basil's motives for donating the reliquary. The epigram does not mention the church or the monastery to which Basil the Nothos donated his "humble gift", but it is reasonable to assume that he donated the relic to the monastery that he had founded himself, St. Basil's. Basil had a reliquary made to put the precious relic in; as the reliquary was decorated with gold and silver, it must have been quite expensive. Although the poet calls Basil's donation a δῶρον πενιχρόν, there can be

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39 See H. Belting, *Corsi di cultura sull' arte ravennate e bizantina* 29 (1982) 52–57 and Boura 1989.

40 Ed. Follieri 1964a: 455–464.

41 See V. Laurent, *EEBS* 23 (1953) 193–205, and W.G. Brokkaar, in: Studia Byzantina et Neohellenica Neerlandica (Byzantina Neerlandica 3). Leiden 1972, 199–234.

but little doubt that the economic value of the reliquary and the relic inside must have been considerable (which is also the reason, of course, why it was stolen by the crusaders and subsequently donated to the Franciscans). Basil's supposed 'modesty' is contradicted by the words that follow immediately afterwards, stating that Basil, with this humble gift, shows his "lavish devotion", ὄλβιον πόθον. These words are difficult to translate, but easy to understand for anyone familiar with Byzantine inscriptions. Inscriptions usually state that the donor donated a precious object or a church ἐκ πόθου, πόθῳ ζέοντι, or the like: "with burning desire", because he shows his devotion to God, the Theotokos or one of the saints by his pious donation. The adjective ὄλβιος is also very common in Byzantine inscriptions. It is used as an attribute to the object donated: the monastery of Lips, for instance, is called an ὄλβιον ἔργον because of the costs involved in having it built and because God's blessing rests on it[42]. In Basil's epigram, however, it is not the object itself that is ὄλβιος, but the pious devotion Basil shows by donating the object. The poet clearly juggles with words and the reason for doing this is merely to mask Basil's false modesty, the feigned embarrassment of riches that shows through in the whole epigram. If Basil was really as modest as he pretends to be by calling his donation a δῶρον πενιχρόν, why should he enumerate the titles and offices that he holds, and mention his imperial lineage? And why should he explicitly state that the reliquary was adorned with gold and silver? The large amounts of money that Basil invested in the purchase of the relic and the production of the reliquary are transformed into a sort of spiritual capital by the very act of donating the object to a religious institution[43]. Basil will cash in his reward in the form of spiritual salvation. It is worth noting that the salvation of his soul is not something Basil hopes for, but expects to obtain. The verb αἰτῶ says it all. Ordinary people do not "request" salvation, they beg for it. However, the highest official in the imperial administration, the *parakoimomenos*, is so close to the emperor and therefore, by implication, so close to God that he can file a petition for admission to heaven[44]. Of course, even a high-powered dignitary, such as Basil the Nothos, needs an intermediary to take care of his petition and deliver it into the hands of God Almighty. This is the task of St. Stephen. The

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42 Ed. C. Mango & E. Hawkins, *DOP* 18 (1964) 300–301.

43 On the economic aspects and symbolic value of donations, see A. Cutler, in: Byzance et les images, ed. A. Guillou & J. Durand. Paris 1994, 287–325.

44 The inscription on the tenth-century staurotheca in Lorch (ed. Frolow 1961: no. 126) states that its donor, a certain Theophanes, viewed the reliquary as a προσευκτικὸν σκήνωμα τῶν *αἰτημάτων*. Since the word αἴτημα, "request", is quite arrogant, and since reliquaries are expensive, Theophanes must have been a high-powered dignitary. I would suggest that he is the famous *parakoimomenos* of Romanos II.

phrase σὸς Βασίλειος ("your Basil") implies a special bond between Basil and St. Stephen. As Basil has "crowned" the head of the Protomartyr once again, this time not with stones, but with precious metals, he deserves to be rewarded a service in return. Just as Basil is an "imperial servant", so is he in the service of St. Stephen. And being the servant of the saint, he rightfully expects to be redeemed accordingly. It is essentially a relationship of give and take. Basil pays. Basil gets something in return. That is how the system of divine economics works.

In spite of all cynicism, however, there can be little doubt that the Byzantines, perhaps with the exception of Basil and a few other presumptuous donors, were not aware of the economic mechanisms that regulate the process of production and consumption of religious luxury objects. Spiritual salvation was of great concern to them, and they honestly believed that pious donations might secure them a place in heaven. Byzantine donors longed for redemption in the life hereafter and their acts of munificence were genuinely inspired by religious motives. Dedicatory inscriptions invariably emphasize that the donor longs for spiritual salvation; see, for instance:

Χαίροις, Γαβριὴλ πρωτάγγελε Κυρίου,
ὁ τὴν Παρθένον προσκομίσας τὸ Χαῖρε·
ἔτευξα τὴν σὴν ἐμφέρειαν τοῦ εἴδους
πρὸς λύτρον ψυχῆς, Λεόντιος ὁ τάλας.

"Hail to thee, Gabriel, for being the first to announce (the birth of) the Lord and for conveying (the words) "Hail Mary" to the Virgin; I, wretched Leontios, made the likeness of thine appearance for the redemption of my soul"[45]. The epigram is written beneath a splendid tenth-century painting of the Archangel represented full-size, his wings spread out, his left hand stretched out and his face directed towards the Theotokos, who is painted on the opposite side of the sanctuary; in the middle, right above the altar, is a medallion that shows the bust of Christ. Leontios addresses the Archangel with the very greeting that the latter uttered when he brought the good tidings to the Virgin: "Hail". He also explains why the Archangel deserves to be hailed, for Gabriel is the πρωτάγγελος, the first messenger of God, the angel who announced to the Holy Virgin that she would give birth to Christ. The somewhat awkward circumlocution in the third verse, τὴν σὴν ἐμφέρειαν τοῦ εἴδους, instead of τὴν σὴν εἰκόνα, alludes to the problem of representing angels. As angels are incorporeal, how can we portray them in the flesh, in human form? Well, Leontios answers, I certainly do not pretend to have portrayed Gabriel as he really is: his authentic image (for that is beyond our capacity), but I

[45] Ed. N. Thierry, in: Markopoulos 1989: 238–243.

simply painted "the likeness of his appearance", the corporeal shape in which he once presented himself to the Holy Virgin. Leontios commissioned this particular wall painting, hoping that he, though a wretched sinner, might be redeemed at the Last Judgment. The holy figures that have to intercede on his behalf are Gabriel the Archangel and the Holy Virgin, whom he had depicted on the triumphal arch. As they are the first two protagonists to play a role in the incarnation of God, they must surely be able to mollify Him by their entreaties. And as Christ in the medallion is looking benevolently upon the scene of the Annunciation depicted in the sanctuary, there is surely hope for Leontios. Moreover, whenever Mass is celebrated, the faithful looking at the bema and its decoration will remember "wretched Leontios" and commemorate him in their prayers. The collective devotion of the faithful assembled in the church that Leontios had decorated ensures that his plea will be heard in the heavenly abodes each time the Incarnation of God is re-enacted upon the altar. To put it otherwise, in modern terms, the money he invested in the decoration of the sanctuary will undoubtedly pay itself back with interest. For Leontios has made sure that his plea for salvation will be heard in heaven, and as Christ normally listens to the intercessions of His mother and Gabriel as well as to the prayers of ordinary people, Leontios can certainly hope for divine forgiveness.

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The Paraklesis

The Paraklesis is a well-known iconographic type of the Theotokos standing upright, her face turned slightly in semi-profile and her left hand holding a text scroll. The earliest picture of the Virgin Paraklesis known to us is a ninth-century mosaic in the church of St. Demetrios in Thessalonica, but this particular mosaic does not yet have the standard feature of later depictions of the Paraklesis: the epigram on the text scroll. The epigram turns up for the first time on three pictures dating from the twelfth century: on a fresco in the church of the Virgin Arakiotissa in Lagoudera on Cyprus, on another fresco in the church of the Anargyroi in Kastoria, and on the icon of the Virgin Paraklesis in Spoleto[46]. The epigram is a dialogue between the Holy Virgin and Jesus Christ:

Τί, μῆτερ, αἰτεῖς; τὴν βροτῶν σωτηρίαν.
παρώργισάν με· συμπάθησον, υἱέ μου.

[46] See S. Der Nersessian, *DOP* 14 (1960) 72–75 and Mercati 1970: II, 509–513.

ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἐπιστρέφουσι· καὶ σῶσον χάριν.
ἕξουσι λύτρον· εὐχαριστῶ σοι, Λόγε[47].

"What do you want, mother?". "The salvation of mankind". "They have angered me". "Forgive them, my son". "But they do not repent". "Well, save them anyway". "They will have their redemption". "I thank you, Christ".

There is some interesting evidence indicating that these verses, and presumably also the iconographic type of the Virgin holding a text scroll, were already known in the tenth century. Among the poems of the Anonymous Italian (c. 900) we find two epigrams that form a dialogue in which the Theotokos pleas on behalf of mankind (no. 5), and her Son responds saying that He always listens to the entreaties of His mother (no. 6)[48]. The first epigram appears to describe a painting of the Virgin Paraklesis and the second one a painting of Christ responding to her plea. The two pictures were probably found at the two opposite piers of the bema, to the left and the right of the altar. The epigrams tell us that the Virgin raised her hands in supplication and pleaded for all men, and that Christ listened to her plea and showed his willingness to forgive mankind. Each of the two epigrams consists of four verses, just like the Paraklesis dialogue, and the words μῆτερ, καλῶς ᾔτησας (no. 6, v. 1) definitely recall the beginning of the Paraklesis text: τί, μῆτερ, αἰτεῖς. Although it cannot be proved with absolute certainty, it would appear that the Anonymous Italian was familiar with the text of the Paraklesis epigram.

The Anonymous Patrician (c. 940–970) is the author of six epigrams on a picture, or set of pictures, showing the Holy Virgin, Jesus Christ and Constantine VII[49]. The fourth epigram is a dialogue between Christ and His mother, which begins with the famous words of the Paraklesis epigram: *Τί, μῆτερ, αἰτεῖς* συμπαθῶς κινουμένη... ("What do you ask, mother, moved by compassion?"). The picture that Constantine VII commissioned is, properly speaking, not an authentic Paraklesis since the Virgin Paraklesis intercedes on behalf of the whole of mankind and not of a specific individual. However, there are some parallels in later Byzantine art for the intrusion of donors in pictorial scenes

[47] For a somewhat different version of the epigram, see Διονυσίου τοῦ ἐκ Φουρνᾶ Ἑρμηνεία τῆς ζωγραφικῆς τέχνης, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus. St. Petersburg 1909, 280. The *Painters' Manual* omits the fourth verse and inserts an unprosodic verse at the beginning: δέξαι δέησιν τῆς σῆς μητρός, οἰκτῖρμον. This version is used by many painters of the late Byzantine and post-Byzantine period.

[48] Ed. Browning 1963: 296, cf. p. 307. See the comments by Baldwin 1982: 10–11.

[49] Ed. Lambros 1922: 47, 10 to 49, 10 (nos. 1–5) and Mercati 1927: 415, 1–6 (no. 6). Lambros' no. γ' actually consists of *two* epigrams: L. 48, 21–24 and 49, 1–4. For all the epigrams edited by Lambros, see the excellent commentary by Mercati 1927: 412–414.

that derive their imagery from the original Paraklesis composition, such as the well-known dedicatory representation of George of Antioch in the Martorana in Palermo. There we see the Holy Virgin in a Paraklesis pose, George kneeling at her feet and Christ in an aureole, extending His arm in blessing[50]. The Theotokos holds a scroll in her left hand, on which we do not read the usual plea for salvation of mankind, but a dedicatory epigram asking for the protection and redemption of George of Antioch. Similarly, in the Patrician's epigrams the Holy Virgin intercedes on behalf of an individual, the emperor, whose private concerns she conveys to her Son, asking that he may be granted a long and blessed life and be pardoned in the life hereafter. And just as Christ in the Martorana shows His approval of His mother's request by a gesture of blessing, the above-mentioned epigram beginning with the standard phrase: τί, μῆτερ, αἰτεῖς, ends with the comforting words: εἰσακούσω, Παρθένε ("I will grant your wish, Virgin"). The only difference between the mosaic in the Martorana and the pictorial composition described by the Anonymous Patrician is that, whereas George of Antioch kneels down to show his humility, Constantine VII is depicted standing upright in front of the Theotokos (L. 48, 24: ἑστῶτα (...) ἄντικρυς ταύτης). But these divergent poses, of course, correspond to the hierarchical difference in status between the admiral of the Norman fleet and the emperor of the Byzantine state. While I do not mean to suggest that the Patrician's epigrams necessarily describe a picture that had more or less the same iconographic features as the one in the Martorana, I do think that it showed the Virgin in a Paraklesis pose interceding on behalf of Constantine VII. The epigrams do not disclose how Christ was depicted: in an aureole as in the Martorana, or standing full-size to the left of the Theotokos or possibly, on the opposite side of the bema or the narthex entrance, facing the dedicatory picture of the Virgin Paraklesis and Constantine VII. It is not entirely clear either, whether Constantine VII was depicted next to the Theotokos (as I am inclined to think) or on a separate picture close to the Virgin Paraklesis. These problems need to be addressed by art historians more equipped in matters of iconography than I am; as a philologist, however, I would like to emphasize that the Patrician's epigrams leave no doubt that the

[50] See Lavagnini 1987 and E. Kitzinger, The Mosaics of St. Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo. Washington, D.C., 1990, 197–206. See also the miniature in Laura A 103 (s. XII) depicting a kneeling donor, the Virgin Paraklesis and Christ in a medallion: I. Spatharakis, The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts. Leiden 1976, 78–79 and fig. 45. At St. Catherine's on the Sinai there is an icon of St. Nicholas with two monks, Klemos and Poimen (the donors); in the upper part of the icon we see a Deësis, in which the Holy Virgin -again in a Paraklesis pose- holds a scroll with an epigram on it, the first verse of which reads: τί μῆτερ αἰτεῖς καὶ τίνος δέῃ, φράσον: see G. and M. Sotiriou, Εἰκόνες τῆς μονῆς Σινᾶ. Athens 1956–1958, I, fig. 173 and II, pp. 160–161.

famous Paraklesis epigram and the picture it accompanies were already known in the tenth century, long before the first pictures known to us of this particular iconographic type.

One of the six epigrams on the picture, or pictures, of the Virgin Paraklesis, Christ and Constantine VII (no. 5: L. 49, 5–10) is particularly interesting:

Ἄνθρωπε, πρόσσχες· ζῶν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνος
ὁ βασιλεὺς νῦν προσλαλεῖ τῇ Παρθένῳ,
μεσῖτιν αὐτὴν τῷ θεανθρώπῳ Λόγῳ
ὥσπερ καταλλάττουσαν αὐτὸν προσφέρων.
εἰ δ' οὐκ ἀκούσεις, τὴν τέχνην μὴ φαυλίσῃς·
ψυχοῦν γὰρ οὐ δίδωσιν αὕτη ζωγράφοις.

"Pay attention (and listen), O man. For the emperor, alive in the picture, now speaks to the Virgin, presenting her as his intermediary to the Word who is both God and Man, since she (knows how to) placate Him. But if you do not hear (his plea), do not blame the art, for it is beyond the capacity of painters to give soul (to inanimate objects)". This is not a very elegant epigram and as badly written texts are usually difficult to translate, I can only offer a provisional translation. But if we ignore the lack of stylistic dexterity and look at what the poet is trying to say, we may notice a few interesting details. First of all, the Anonymous Patrician clearly imitates the epigram by Geometres quoted at the beginning of this chapter – the epigram on the Forty Martyrs inscribed in the Panagia Phorbiotissa at Asinou. There we read: προσσχὼν ἀκούσεις (v. 2) and εἰ δ' οὐκ ἀκούσεις (v. 3). The Patrician borrows the latter phrase word for word (see v. 5) and renders the former phrase in a slightly different form: πρόσσχες (v. 1), which has more or less the same meaning as προσσχὼν ἀκούσεις: "pay attention (and listen)" versus "if you pay attention, you may hear". Secondly, the reference to the "art" (τέχνη) may perhaps seem peculiar, but is not without parallel in tenth-century poetry. See, for instance, the two verse inscriptions on the Warsaw ivory diptych which admonish us not to admire the art (μὴ τὴν τέχνην θαύμαζε), but God himself, who is responsible for the miracles and marvels depicted on the diptych[51]; or the beautiful epigram by Constantine the Rhodian on the Theotokos (*AP* XV, 17) telling us that since she cannot be portrayed with lights and luminaries, as she rightly deserves, we have to depict her "with the material that nature and the laws of painting (γραφῆς νόμος) afford". And thirdly, the Patrician's epigram plays with the well-known *topos* that pictures are so lifelike that the viewer has the impression that the figures depicted are almost alive, for they seem to speak and to move in space. However, the *topos* is presented with a twist. For, at the

[51] Ed. P. Rutkowska, *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie* 6 (1965) 96.

very end, we are told to our surprise that "the art" does not allow painters to breathe life into inanimate material: to "animate" (ψυχοῦν) is beyond their capacity. But if painters cannot make pictures come to life, as the poet overtly declares, how is it possible that the emperor appears to be "alive" (ζῶν)? The answer is that the picture is what the viewer reads in it. If the viewer looks at the picture and listens to its message attentively, he may see the emperor addressing the Holy Virgin and asking her to present his petition to her Son; but if he only casts a casual glance at it and does not perceive its message with proper care, the picture remains mute. Pictures are lifeless as they are, but may come to life if viewers read the pictorial message they convey. It is a matter of mental and visual imagination. Images need to be seen through imaginative eyes.

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Theodore of Stoudios, no. 67

Epigram cycles are groups of epigrams that constitute a cohesive whole and describe the pictorial programme of a specific monument or the miniatures of a specific illuminated manuscript. In the second chapter (pp. 76–81) I discussed a number of epigram cycles, either consisting of authentic verse inscriptions or assembled from various sources as quarries for inscriptions; special emphasis was placed on the manuscript evidence in general. In the following pages, until the end of this chapter, I shall examine several epigram cycles in more detail.

Let me begin by saying that there are two epigram cycles that I will not discuss, the reason being that Ševčenko and Speck have already admirably studied these two collections. Ševčenko published a highly interesting collection of tenth-century epigrams that were inscribed on the door panels (made of ivory or inlaid bone) of the Chapel of the Burning Bush in the monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai; the panels showed various scenes of the life of Moses as well as the Transfiguration[52]. And Speck convincingly proved that epigrams nos. 61–84 of Theodore of Stoudios, which describe pictures of saints, monks and church fathers in the Stoudios monastery, constitute a cohesive whole and form an epigram cycle[53].

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[52] Ševčenko 1998: 284–298. See also J. Grossmann, *JÖB* 50 (2000) 243–265 and I. Ševčenko, *JÖB* 52 (2002) 177–184.

[53] See Speck 1964b: 333–344 and 1968: 211–217.

However, before we turn to the epigram cycles, let us first look at one of these epigrams of Theodore of Stoudios, no. 67 ("on St. Gregory the Theologian"):

Βροντῶν τὰ θεῖα τῇ βοῇ τῶν δογμάτων
ἤχησας ὄντως τὴν ὑπ' οὐρανόν, μάκαρ·
καὶ πάσας ἀπρὶξ μωράνας τὰς αἱρέσεις
τὸν κόσμον ἐστήριξας ἐν τοῖς σοῖς λόγοις[54].

"Thundering the divine doctrine with the roar of dogmas, your voice truly resounded all over the earth, O saint, and by making all heresies at once look foolish, you fastened the world to the anchor of your words". The epigram is difficult to translate because Theodore of Stoudios uses a very poetic diction, which here and there infringes upon the rules of Greek syntax: βροντῶ plus direct object is most unusual, and the transitive use of the verb ἠχῶ is unique[55]. The adverb ἀπρίξ ordinarily means "tightly" and is used in combination with verbs: "to hold tight", "to cling to something tightly"; but here it appears to modify the meaning of the determiner πάσας: "all … together", "all … without any exception", "all at once"[56]. The epigram alludes to certain Biblical passages: for τὴν ὑπ' οὐρανόν, see Luke 17: 24; for μωράνας, see Paul, 1 Cor. 1: 20; and for τὸν κόσμον ἐστήριξας, see the beginning of the book Genesis. Gregory of Nazianzos' thundering is a theme that also occurs in other epigrams on this church father: see, for instance, Geometres, Cr. 302, 11: βροντῆς λόγων πληροῦσα γῆν τε καὶ πόλον ("filling heaven and earth with the thunder of your words"), or an anonymous ninth-century epigram that begins as follows: Γρηγόριος βροντῆς νοερᾶς γόνος ἐστίν ("Gregory is the descendant of the spiritual thunder")[57]. Gregory is said to be "thundering" because he is primarily known to the Byzantines as "the Theologian" (a honorific title which was awarded to him at the Council of Chalcedon). The "theologian" among the apostles is St. John. Byzantine epigrams on John the Apostle usually emphasize that he was "the

[54] Speck prints τὴν ὑπουρανόν (v. 2) by analogy to τὴν ὑφήλιον (Speck 1968: 95); but if the word was a compound adjective, it would have to be accentuated as follows: *ὑπούρανος (cf. ὑπουράνιος).

[55] Cf. the Anon. Italian, no. 12 (ed. Browning 1963: 298), vv. 3–4: λόγοι δὲ πᾶσαν ὡς Θεοῦ φωναὶ κτίσιν βροντῶσι, see Baldwin 1982: 13–14.

[56] Theodore uses the adverb twice, here and in epigram 38, 4: (Christ is) διττὸς ἀπρὶξ τὴν φύσιν ("er ist seiner Natur nach *untrennbar* doppelt", as Speck rightly translates). The lexicon of Hesychios derives ἀπρίξ from πρίω, "to saw". This false etymology, "indivisible", accounts for Theodore's use of the adverb in 38, 4. It also explains how the adverb is probably to be interpreted here. The adverb goes with πάσας: "all … together", "all at once", i.e., Gregory refuted *all* heresies, *none excluded* or *at one blow*.

[57] See Sajdak 1914: 270.

son of thunder" (after Mark 3: 17) and that he "thundered" while preaching his divine words to the world[58]. It is this very parallel between the two theologians (the apostle and the church father) that explains why Theodore of Stoudios refers to the thundering power of Gregory's dogmatic doctrines in epigram 67. The metaphors βροντῶν, βοῇ and ἤχησας all derive from this analogy.

It is also worth noticing that Theodore of Stoudios quotes himself. His hymn on St. Gregory begins as follows: Τὰ σοφώτατα / τῆς φλογερῆς σου γλώττης ἔπη, / ἀστραπτόμενα / ἐκ τοῦ ἀρρήτου φάους, λάμπων, / τὴν οἰκουμένην / κατελάμπρυνας, / Γρηγόριε, / βροντήσας φρικτῶς / τῆς Τριάδος τὸ δόγμα, / καὶ πάσας ἀπρὶξ / τὰς αἱρέσεις μωράνας, / ἱεράρχων / ὁ θεολογικώτατος[59]. Τὴν οἰκουμένην = τὴν ὑπ' οὐρανόν, βροντήσας (...)τὸ δόγμα = βροντῶν τὰ θεῖα τῇ βοῇ τῶν δογμάτων, and καὶ πάσας ἀπρὶξ / τὰς αἱρέσεις μωράνας = καὶ πάσας ἀπρὶξ μωράνας τὰς αἱρέσεις. Of course, it is difficult to decide which text was written first, the hymn or the epigram, but it does not really matter. For vastly more important than the question of priority is the fact that what sounds right in a hymn can also be used for the composition of an epigram on a work of art, or the other way around. How do we account for this interchange of genres? How can a text move from one genre to another? It has doubtless something to do with Byzantine perceptions of the literary and the artistic, but since there is no good study of Byzantine aesthetics[60], it is difficult to provide an answer. As Maguire pointed out, hymnography and art relate to each other in Byzantium: hymns are visualized in paint and paintings are transformed into the metaphorical language of hymnography[61]. In Byzantium there is no fixed boundary between literature and art. Language visualizes and the visual turns into words. Since the visual language of icons is reflected in the imagery of hymns, it is hardly surprising that these literary images in their turn reverberate in epigrams on works of art. It is a sort of domino effect. But whereas there is always a primal cause for the domino effect, a wave of falling pieces from one end of the row to the other, here we see all sorts of influences going in opposite directions. Hymns, art, epigrams – all these are interrelated and influence each other, with the result that they intertwine into an undisentangable maze of reciprocities.

The epigram is also found in a number of mid tenth-century Italian manuscripts containing the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzos[62], where it no longer serves its original purpose as a verse inscription on a picture of the saint, but

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[58] See Kominis 1951: 274–278; Follieri 1956: 77, 80, 152 and 154; Hörandner 2000: 79.
[59] Ed. Pitra 1876–88: I, 351 (no. VIII). See Speck 1968: 224.
[60] G. Mathew, Byzantine Aesthetics. London 1963, is outdated; S. Averincev, L' anima e lo specchio. Bologna 1988, is too speculative to be of any use.
[61] See Maguire 1981: *passim*, esp. pp. 5–8.
[62] See Hörandner 1994b: 197–199 and Somers 1999: 533–542.

in fact functions as a book epigram celebrating the author of the homilies. One certainly cannot pretend that the epigram was re-used indiscriminately, simply because it floats from one context to another[63]. For, with all its emphasis on Gregory's doctrinal expositions, the epigram perfectly fits into its new context. It is actually quite an appropriate homage to the author of the homilies, for if we had not known what its original purpose was, no one would have suspected that it was not an authentic book epigram.

Thus we see that the text of Theod. St. 67 serves as part of an encomiastic hymn, as an epigram on a work of art, and as a book epigram. The words remain practically the same, but the contexts differ. Since the context largely determines how a poetic text should be interpreted, we are faced with three totally different interpretations of the same text, all three of which can be equally defended.

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Byzantine Charioteer Epigrams

The *Planudean Anthology* contains a series of Byzantine epigrams that describe images of famous sixth-century charioteers, which were depicted on the ceiling of the imperial gallery at the Hippodrome[64]. This epigram cycle (*APl* 380–387) does not derive from the original anthology of Cephalas, but from one of its oldest apographs: Pl*a* – an apograph produced at the behest of Thomas the Patrician and Logothete tou Dromou in the first quarter of the tenth century[65]. The epigrams are written in paroxytone dodecasyllables that are prosodically correct according to Byzantine standards, but deviate from the rules of ancient Greek prosody: for instance, the short iota in Κωνσταντῖνος (384. 1; 385. 1) or the long upsilon in Πορφύριος (380. 3; 381. 2). The epigrams elaborate on the typically Byzantine theme of 'pictorial liveliness': the pictures are so true to nature and so lifelike that you would almost think that the

[63] This 're-using' of epigrams is not without parallel in Byzantium. For instance, Marc. gr. 53 (a. 968) contains four hexametric distichs on Basil the Great's homily *In S. Christi generationem*: ed. Rudberg 1961: 63–64. These four book epigrams, I would suggest, originally served as epigrams on pictures of the Nativity. See, for instance: δέρκεο παρθένον ὧδε γάλα προχέουσαν ἀνάνδρως / καὶ περάτων τίκτουσαν ἀπειρόχρονον βασιλῆα ("Behold the Virgin here, as she, untouched by a man, pours forth milk and gives birth to the timeless Lord of the universe").

[64] See Cameron 1973: 188–200.

[65] See chapter 3, pp. 115–116.

charioteers have come to life again and are ready to continue their races. The epigrams were probably composed in the short period after the completion of Cephalas' anthology and before they entered the manuscript of Thomas the Patrician: that is, between c. 900 and 925.

Since there seems to be no reason why the famous charioteers of the past, however celebrated they were during the reigns of Anastasius, Justin and Justinian, would have been portrayed in the imperial gallery as late as 900–925, Alan Cameron surmised that the portraits of the charioteers themselves date from the period of their glorious triumphs and that the epigrams merely form a literary description of late antique art[66]. This is certainly an imaginative theory, but it entails a few serious problems. Firstly, why should a tenth-century author write epigrams on works of art produced some four hundred years earlier? And secondly, how likely is the scenario of late antique pictures surviving unaltered in the imperial gallery of the Hippodrome for the next four centuries? Does not every emperor wish to see his own imperial programme reflected in the sacrosanct spaces he frequents?

If we examine the epigrams closely, there can be little doubt that the epigrams are, in fact verse inscriptions on *contemporary* works of art. First of all, all the epigrams comprise precisely the same number of verses: five. If these epigrams merely served a literary purpose, there would really be no reason why the poet should confine himself to quintets. But if the epigrams served as verse inscriptions, the poet would have every reason to force his texts into the straitjacket of five verses, for the size of verse inscriptions is obviously predetermined by the space available on the works of art they are supposed to accompany. Secondly, and more importantly, the epigrams themselves leave no doubt that they describe contemporary works of art. See, for instance, *APl* 386:

Χείρ, ἴδε, γεννᾷ τοὺς πάλαι τεθνηκότας·
Ἰουλιανὸς καὶ γὰρ ὥς πάλαι σθένει
ἕλκων, μεθέλκων Ῥουσίου τὰς ἡνίας·
καὶ νῦν γραφεὶς ἕστηκεν ὑψοῦ σὺν δίφρῳ·
τὸ νεῦμα χεὶρ μένει δέ· τὴν νύσσαν δότε[67].

"Look, the hand (of the artist) gives life to those who passed away long ago, for Julian is as strong as of old, pulling the reins of the Reds hither and thither. And now he stands depicted up there, along with his chariot. His hand awaits the signal. Give him free course!". The epigram emphasizes that the picture of Julian standing on his chariot is so lifelike that it is as if he is only waiting for

[66] See Cameron 1973: 201–204.
[67] The ms. reads ἴδε γεννᾷ; modern editions print οἶδε γεννᾶν *metri causa*. This emendation is not necessary in view of the casual way Byzantine poets handle the *dichrona*.

the signal, and off he will go. Julian and the other three charioteers are long dead, but come to life again in the pictures as strong and glorious as they once used to be. The words καὶ νῦν γραφείς clearly refer to the present and indicate that the making of Julian's picture coincides chronologically with the moment in time that the epigram came into being: that is, *now*.

Cameron argues that the pictures date from the early sixth century because the epigrams seem to offer first-hand information on the charioteers, especially on their age and the colours they sported[68]. I would suggest, on the contrary, that the Byzantine poet obtained all his information from the late antique epigrams on the statues of the charioteers (*APl* 335–378 and *AP* XV, 41–50). His source was the anthology of Cephalas itself. Let us imagine him sitting at his writing desk and opening his copy of Cephalas at the page where the series of charioteer epigrams begins. He only has to read the first four of the thirty-two epigrams on Porphyrius (*APl* 335–362 & *AP* XV, 44, 46–47, 50) to get all the information he needs: Porphyrius is the son of Kalchas; he is a young man; and he races for the Blues (*APl* 335–338, cf. *APl* 380–381). The poet also borrows two phrases that appeal to him: Πορφύριον Κάλχαντος (*APl* 335. 1) = Πορφύριος Κάλχαντος (*APl* 381. 2); πρῶτον ἴουλον ἔχων (*APl* 336. 6) = ἴουλον ἀνθῶν πρῶτον (*APl* 381. 1). Then he turns to the next charioteer, Faustinus (*APl* 363–364, cf. *APl* 382–383). Unfortunately, the late antique epigrams do not mention the colour he sported. But our poet is not put off by a problem as trivial as that. For having mentioned the Blues (the team of Porphyrius), he now simply needs the opposite colour: Green, and thus Faustinus becomes a Green charioteer. And since the late antique epigrams he was reading tell us that Faustinus was an old man, the poet, too, emphasizes that the charioteer used to compete in the Hippodrome at an advanced age. The next charioteer is Constantine (*AP* XV, 41–42, *APl* 365, *AP* XV, 43 and *APl* 366–375, cf. *APl* 384–385). The late antique epigrams again do not tell us for which team Constantine used to race, but since our poet already has a Blue and a Green charioteer, he now needs someone to compete for the Whites (a subdivision of the Blues). Well, Constantine will do! The poet imitates one of the epigrams on Constantine: see *APl* 365. 1–3 ἐξότε Κωνσταντῖνος ἔδυ δόμον Ἄϊδος εἴσω, / πλῆτο κατηφείης ἱπποσύνης στάδιον, / τερπωλὴ δ' ἀπέλειπε θεήμονας and *APl* 385. 3–5 ἀφ' οὗ δὲ τοῦτον ἥρπασεν Χάρων, ἔδυ / τὸ φῶς ἁμίλλης ἱππικῶν δρομημάτων / καὶ πᾶσα τέρψις τοῦ θεάτρου καὶ τέχνη. The poet now only needs a Red charioteer to complete the four colours. However, the charioteer that is next in line, Uranius (*AP* XV, 49, *APl* 376–377, *AP* XV, 48 and *APl* 378), used to compete for the Blues and the Greens, as the first epigram informs us. So our poet cannot use him. But fortunately for him, the last charioteer of the series of late antique

[68] See Cameron 1973: 202–203.

epigrams, Julian (*AP* XV, 45, cf. *APl* 386–387), is not attributed a specific colour in the sole epigram written in his honour. Perhaps the poet even read a typically Byzantine innuendo in the first verse of the epigram stating that Julian was a "nursling of Tyre". As Tyre was famous for its purple dye, the poet may have thought that Julian was "purplish", that is, "red".

In short, seeing that the Byzantine epigrams present the charioteers in the same order as the late antique ones and contain obvious literary reminiscences, there can be but little doubt that the tenth-century poet was familiar with the late antique epigrams on the charioteers. Since he only needed to know a few iconographic details, he read the late antique epigrams rather superficially. He just haphazardly thumbed through his copy of Cephalas and picked out the first few epigrams on each of the charioteers. If he had read more carefully, he would have seen that Porphyrius regularly changed team and did not only race for the Blues, but also for the Greens. He then would also have seen that two of the epigrams on Uranius make it abundantly clear that his colleague Constantine used to compete for the Greens (*AP* XV, 48. 1–3 and *APl* 376. 4). In fact, the tenth-century poet committed a grave error by arbitrarily assuming that Constantine used to race for the Whites. But then again, the poet was not interested in historical accuracy. It did not matter for which teams the charioteers were once racing. The poet simply wanted four famous names and four matching colours. If the first epigrams on Porphyrius had stated that he sported the colour Green, the poet would just as easily have portrayed Porphyrius as a Green charioteer. And then he would have stated that Faustinus once used to compete for the Blues, simply because he needed the opposite colour of the Greens. The early tenth-century epigrams do not provide, and more importantly, do not purport to provide, accurate historical information on the charioteers of the past, but rather constitute a literary reflection of the late antique epigrams found in the anthology of Cephalas.

The poet of these Byzantine epigrams must have been the very person who told the artists how they should portray the ancient charioteers on the ceiling of the παρακυπτικόν, the gallery in the Kathisma above the level of the imperial box[69]. While it was the poet who came up with the iconographic programme for the decoration of the παρακυπτικόν, it was the emperor who made it possible by providing the necessary funds. It is reasonable to assume that the poet tried his best to please his patron and that the pictures of the ancient charioteers were precisely what the emperor desired to see when he was sitting in his imperial box in the Hippodrome. It is not known who was the reigning emperor at the time: Leo VI, Alexander, young Constantine Porphyrogenitus or Romanos I. Epigram *APl* 385 begins with a rather awkward phrase possibly indicating that

[69] See Cameron 1973: 200–201.

when the epigrams and the pictures were produced, young Constantine was the ruling emperor: Κωνσταντῖνος γ' ἦν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς πάλαι χρόνοις / λευκῆς χρόας τέθριππον ἕλκων εὐστρόφως ("This was Constantine, but in the old days, when he skilfully drove the four-horse chariot of the Whites"). It cannot be ruled out, however, that this is simply a clumsy expression and that the poet with the connective ἀλλὰ only wanted to stress that Constantine lived *very* long ago: "This was Constantine in the days of yore, when he, etc".

It may perhaps seem somewhat peculiar that the tenth-century decoration of the παρακυπτικόν was inspired by late antique poetry. It is well known that some forms of Byzantine art, such as classicizing miniatures in illuminated manuscripts, go back to Hellenistic, early Roman or late antique works of art[70]. And some of these ancient models, in turn, derive their inspiration from literature: Homer, Euripides, Menander, and, in late antiquity, Nonnos. But did ancient and late antique secular literature directly influence Byzantine art? The wall paintings in the early eleventh-century monastery of Eski Gümüš provide an interesting parallel to the decoration of the imperial gallery. In a rock-cut chamber above the narthex we find a few paintings depicting Aesopic fables with *tituli* in dodecasyllabic verse[71]. As this "Aesopic" decoration is without parallel both in Antiquity and in Byzantium, there is no need to assume in the Weitzmannian mould that the painter imitated some late antique model which -alas!- no longer exists. The painter must have directly drawn his inspiration from the reading of the fables themselves. Likewise, the poet of *APl* 380–387 came up with the idea of the iconographic programme after having read the late antique epigrams in the anthology of Cephalas.

However, there is still one essential question that needs to be addressed: why was the imperial loge adorned with pictures of late antique charioteers in the early tenth century? First of all, this is undoubtedly related to the classicizing movement of the time, of which the anthology of Cephalas forms a splendid example. Given the large number of copies of Cephalas' anthology in circulation in the first half of the tenth century, ancient and late antique epigrams must have been much in vogue at the time. Secondly, as noted by many scholars, even at the peak of the classicizing movement the Byzantines do not to appear to be much interested in the classical legacy itself, but rather in its shadowy reflections in late antique art and literature. The Byzantines see themselves as heirs to the christianized Roman empire. And their emperors see

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[70] The Paris Psalter, the Bible of Niketas, evangelists looking like ancient philosophers, ivories depicting *putti*, silver plates with dionysiac scenes, etc., etc. – in short, all the imitations of classical art, on which the concept of the so-called Macedonian Renaissance is based.

[71] See M. Gough, *Anatolian Studies* 15 (1965) 162–164. See also chapter 8, p. 259.

themselves as new Constantines and new Justinians. Therefore, the image of imperial victory, as reflected in the glorious feats of Porphyrius and other charioteers of late antiquity, was much more familiar to the Byzantines than, say, the victory of an ancient athlete at the Olympic Games. And thirdly, when the Byzantines and their emperors were present at a spectacle in the Hippodrome, they could see the remnants of their glorious past on the *spina*: the Theodosian obelisk, for instance, but also the statues of the famous charioteers. Porphyrius and the other charioteers were there to remind them of the glory that was Rome: the "new Rome", that is, in its heyday before the Arabs and the "barbarous" iconoclasts despoiled it of its former splendour. Again as noted by many scholars[72], the classicizing movement of the ninth and tenth centuries is basically a reaction to the disasters of the dark ages. When the military, economic and cultural crisis was over, the Byzantines tried to link up with late antique traditions by simply pretending that the links with the past had never really been severed, not even by the intermediary period of cultural decline, for which they blamed the iconoclasts. The cultural revival of the ninth and tenth centuries is a nostalgic return to the legacy of late antiquity. And the indisputable fact that ninth-century Byzantium was quite different from sixth-century Byzantium did not stop the Byzantine irredentists from dreaming that the glorious past could be recovered if people just tried hard enough.

It is against the background of these ideological preferences, literary vogues and cultural illusions that one needs to view the early tenth-century decoration of the imperial gallery. In sharp contrast to the sixth-century emperors who allowed the circus factions to erect statues of contemporary charioteers, and to Constantine V who allegedly ordered that his own favourite charioteer Ouraniakos should be depicted on the ceiling of the Milion[73], here we have an early tenth-century emperor desirous of representing the charioteers of the past rather than those of his own time. This is quite peculiar. In fact, it rather perversely shows that the idea of imperial *renovatio* popular in the ninth and tenth centuries was nothing but a hollow sham. While earlier emperors granted their charioteers the prerogative of sharing in the glory of imperial victory (as long as it did not diminish their own authority), the emperors of the Macedonian dynasty apparently did not tolerate any infringements on their sovereign power. They did not wish to look at pictures of living champions. But pictures of charioteers long dead are another matter, of course. It is not just that dead charioteers cannot possibly claim a share in imperial victory, but the fame of their illustrious exploits also relates to the imperial institution itself,

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[72] Above all Paul Speck in numerous publications: see, for instance, Speck 1998.

[73] See: La Vie d' Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre, ed. M.-F. Auzépy. Aldershot 1997, 166 and 265, n. 411–412.

the historical continuum of the past and the present. The late antique charioteers were there, on the ceiling of the imperial gallery, to remind viewers of the everlasting imperial grandeur – dim figures of the past, but alive in the present. Who they really were and what they had actually achieved in times past, was utterly irrelevant as long as appearances were kept up and people could pretend that nothing had changed in the course of time. The pictures of the charioteers in the imperial gallery had no historical dimension, but merely served to emphasize the concept of imperial victory at its brightest and to highlight the imperturbability and permanence of the imperial institution itself.

It is not known what the pictures looked like. In almost all the epigrams the pictures of the charioteers are said to be so lifelike that it is as if the charioteers are poised to race upwards, straight into heaven where they will receive their crowns. And in *APl* 382. 1 and 384. 2 the ceiling on which the charioteers were depicted is called a δόμος, a vault[74]. It would seem, therefore, that the four charioteers were depicted each in one quarter of the inside of a vault, with their chariots and their horses moving upwards[75]. There is no need to assume that the tenth-century artists imitated late antique art, only because the pictures they made portrayed famous charioteers of the past. Since those responsible for the iconographic programme of the imperial gallery were not interested in historical accuracy, there is no reason why the late antique charioteers should have been depicted exactly as they were represented in the Hippodrome. And although the decoration of the παρακυπτικόν formed an artistic response to the literary movement of classicism, the pictures were not necessarily classicizing. The "oriental" representations of charioteers on eighth- and ninth-century silks (the Aachen-Cluny textile and, especially, the beautiful Münsterbilsen textile)[76] probably form a splendid illustration of the kind of pictures that could once be found on the ceiling of the imperial gallery. On the Münsterbilsen textile we see four horses lifting their front legs and the charioteer raising his hands upward. There is a perpendicular movement in this picture, just as required by the text of the Byzantine epigrams on the charioteers. Up they go, ascending to heaven.

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[74] See Cameron 1973: 201 and 205.

[75] Compare, for instance, the vault mosaic in the Capella Arcivescovile of the Cathedral of Ravenna, where we see four slender angels rising upwards to support the chi-ro medallion in the centre: see J. Lowden, Early Christian & Byzantine Art. London 1997, fig. 66.

[76] See Cameron 1973: figs. 26 and 27. Cf. the eighth-century solar table in the Vatican Ptolemy (Vat. gr. 1291), showing the emperor/sun and his four-horse chariot at the centre of the zodiac.

Three Christological Epigram Cycles

As I shall explain in Appendix VII, Par. Suppl. gr. 690 contains two excerpts, the first on fols. 64v–65v and the second on fols. 116r–117r, from a major collection of epigrams and poems by George of Pisidia, which is no longer extant. Part of this collection was an epigram cycle on christological scenes, which was only partially copied by the scribe. In the first excerpt he copied six epigrams: St. 29–34; in the second excerpt he not only copied ten other epigrams: St. 50–59, but also three doublets (epigrams also found in the first excerpt): St. 29, 30 and 32. Because of these three doublets, it is fairly easy to reconstruct the original order of the epigrams: namely, St. 50, 29, 51–52, 30–31, 53–55, 32–33, 56, 34 and 57–59. It is beyond any doubt that the original epigram cycle contained more than these sixteen epigrams, but since we can only guess what is missing, it would be a mere waste of time and energy to speculate on the original contents of Pisides' epigram cycle.

The sixteen epigrams deal with the following iconographic subjects: Herod and the Magi (St. 50), the Adoration of the Magi (St. 29), the Flight into Egypt (St. 51), the Hypapante (St. 52), the Baptism (St. 30–31 and 53)[77], the Healing of the Lame (St. 54), the Entry into Jerusalem (St. 55), the Betrayal (St. 32), Christ in Fetters (St. 33)[78], the Crucifixion (St. 56 and 34), the Entombment (St. 57), the Anastasis (St. 58) and the Chairete (St. 59). Seeing that the Baptism is treated in three different epigrams and the Crucifixion in two, it does not seem very likely that the epigram cycle was originally intended to be inscribed on a specific monument, or served as captions to the miniatures of a single illuminated manuscript. For there is no good reason why a monument or an illuminated manuscript should bear more than one depiction of the Baptism and the Crucifixion. However, the mere fact that the christological scenes are presented in a purely chronological order, from the Magi to the Chairete, doubtless indicates that at the time Pisides was writing, Byzantine artists were already exploiting the device of iconographic cycles of the life of Christ, such as we find in later art (usually in the abbreviated form of the feast cycle).

[77] The text of St. 53 may seem somewhat obscure at first sight, but "the axe that is near" and "the trees that will be burnt" undoubtedly refer to the words of John the Baptist to the Pharisees (Matt. 3: 10, Luke 3: 9), which he uttered immediately before Jesus arrived at the Jordan to be baptized. The lemma of St. 53, εἰς τὴν αὐτήν, does not refer back to St. 52 (εἰς τὴν ὑπαπαντήν), but to St. 30–31 (εἰς τὴν βάπτισιν).

[78] Entitled: εἰς τὴν ἀπαγωγήν, on the leading-away. This is probably the scene of Christ in shackles being led before Pilate (Matt. 27: 2, Mark 15: 1) or possibly the Way of the Cross (see Hörandner 1994a: no. XIII, p. 129 and n. 53).

The most interesting feature of this epigram cycle is the presence of an epigram on the Anastasis as early as c. 610–630. The epigram (St. 58) reads:

῞Αιδην πατήσας ἐξανέστης τοῦ τάφου
καὶ τὴν πεσοῦσαν ἐξανέστησας φύσιν.

”Having crushed Hades underfoot, you rose from the grave and raised the fallen nature (of mankind)”. In early Byzantine art the awesome mystery of the Resurrection is not shown directly, but rather alluded to in the form of the Myrrhophoroi, either depicted next to the empty tomb (Women at the Tomb) or meeting the resurrected Christ who welcomes them (Chairete). The earliest pictures of the Anastasis date from the early eighth century. The image of the Anastasis shows Christ bursting the gates of Hell and releasing Adam from the shackles of death. The representation of the Anastasis may assume divergent forms, such as Christ walking over the bolts of Hell's gates or trampling on the figure of Hades, Christ striding toward Adam and Eve or dragging them from the grave, and so forth. Despite all these important iconographic differences, the central theme of the Anastasis remains essentially the same in all the images and epigrams that have come down to us: victory over death. Hades is vanquished and the faithful are redeemed by the resurrection of Christ. In her excellent book on the Anastasis[79], Kartsonis connects the genesis of the image to late seventh-century theological disputes between Anastasios of Sinai and various heretical sects, such as the Theopaschites who claimed that God, too, had suffered on the cross – a theory clearly opposed to the orthodox view that the two natures of Christ are not to be confused and that Christ had suffered in the flesh as any other mortal being. That the pictorial scene of the Anastasis came into being under the influence of debates concerning the complex relationship between the two natures of Christ, seems indisputable. I do not think, therefore, that the epigram by Pisides on the Anastasis undermines the central thesis of Kartsonis' book, but the epigram leaves no doubt that the origins of the Anastasis should be dated at least some fifty years earlier. The *Hodegos* by Anastasios of Sinai as well as the Acts of the Quinisext Council in Trullo (691–692) provide extremely valuable evidence on the theological background of the Anastasis, but should not be seen as its starting point. These two texts are merely documents testifying to the lively theological debates of the preceding decades, which crystallized into the iconographic type of the Anastasis.

St. 58 is not the only epigram by Pisides on the theme of the Anastasis. There are three more epigrams: St. 75, 103 and 104. In St. 75 Pisides calls the liturgical feast of the Anastasis "the grace that manifests itself most clearly among all feasts". Since "light" and "clarity" are the key words in this partic-

[79] A. Kartsonis, Anastasis. The Making of an Image. Princeton 1986.

ular epigram, I suspect that it does not describe the Anastasis in the classic sense of the word, but rather the late antique iconographic type of the Resurrection that shows the tomb of Christ blazing with light[80]. St. 103 and 104 form part of a short series of epigrams on the Great Feasts: Annunciation, Nativity, Crucifixion, Palm Sunday, Ascension and Anastasis (St. 96–104). The text of St. 104 is particularly interesting as it mentions most of the iconographic elements traditionally associated with the scene of the Anastasis: "Appearing in the grave, you have broken the gates of Hades and bound him in fetters; and victorious you take off, bringing Adam and Eve to life again. The whole world worships your power". Here we have the shattered gates of Hell, the figure of Hades lying in fetters and Christ hastily emerging from the grave (ἐκτρέχεις), and literally bringing (φέρων) Adam and Eve to life again. Clearly the epigram describes the image of the Anastasis. Pisides particularly emphasizes the aspect of triumphant victory. Christ is victorious (νικηφόρος) and all people bow down respectfully (προσκυνεῖ) at the sight of His sovereign power, as they would do before the emperor.

The epigrams by Ignatios Magistor on the decoration of the church of the Virgin of the Source (the *Pege*) can be found in the Greek Anthology (*AP* I, 109–114)[81]. The church was adorned with mosaics by Emperor Basil I between 870 and 879, when his sons Constantine and Leo were officially co-emperors: see the dedicatory epigram, no. 109. Epigrams 110–114 describe the Ascension, the Anastasis, the Transfiguration, the Presentation in the Temple and the Chairete. The lemma attached to no. 111, ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ναῷ εἰς τὴν σταύρωσιν, poses a serious problem. The text of the epigram reads:

Ὁ νεκρὸς ῞Αιδης ἐξεμεῖ τεθνηκότας,
κάθαρσιν εὑρὼν σάρκα τὴν τοῦ δεσπότου.

"Dead Hades vomits up the dead, after having been purged by the flesh of the Lord". The unsavoury metaphor of vomiting Hades can be found in many Byzantine epigrams on the Anastasis: see, for instance, Prodromos, Tetr. 231a, vv. 2–3: ναί, πλῆττε τὴν ἄπληστον ῞ΑΙδου γαστέρα / ἕως ἂν οὓς πέπωκεν ἐξαναπτύσῃ ("keep on punching Hades in his insatiable stomach until he will spit out those whom he has devoured"). So, seeing that no. 111 appears to be an epigram on the Anastasis, how do we account for the lemma? In her book on the Anastasis,

[80] See Kartsonis (footnote above), 21–23.

[81] Makris 1997: 12–13, argues that epigrams *AP* I, 115–118 were also inscribed in the church of the Source. But whereas 109–114 are written in dodecasyllable, 115 and 116. 3–4 [epigram 116. 1–2 is spurious] are written in hexameter and probably date from the fifth or sixth century. Moreover, whereas the lemmata of 109–115 explicitly state that these epigrams were inscribed in the church of the Source, the lemmata attached to the following epigrams do not mention their place of provenance.

Kartsonis assumes that the epigram describes either an extremely rare type of the Crucifixion, in which the cross is firmly planted in the stomach of Hades, or an equally unusual iconographic composition which combines the Crucifixion and the Rising of the Dead[82]. It is worth noting, however, that the epigram does not refer to the cross. If the cross is the emetic that makes Hades vomit, why does the poet not mention it expressly? And why do later Anastasis epigrams, such as the one by Prodromos, use the metaphorical image of vomiting Hades if it actually refers to the Crucifixion? Is the lemma incorrect? Byzantine scribes were sometimes rather absent-minded, especially at the end of a hard day's work. The epigrams on the decoration of the church of the Source can be found at the lower half of page 62 of the Palatine manuscript. This was the last page copied by scribe A (the following pages were written by his fellow scribe J). When he reached page 62, scribe A was evidently getting very tired, as a few scribal errors clearly indicate: he put the lemma of 114 above 113 (but having discovered his mistake, erased it and wrote the correct title) and conflated the texts of 30 and 116 by way of haplography (a mistake which he afterwards deleted)[83]. The scribe's fatigue probably also accounts for the puzzling lemma attached to epigram no. 111. Between the epigrams on the Ascension and the Anastasis there must have been an epigram on the Crucifixion, of which he copied only the title, but forgot to copy the text. He then turned to the text of the next epigram (on the Anastasis), which he faithfully copied. In other words, because of his scribal error due to fatigue, scribe A provided the lemma, but not the text of the epigram on the Crucifixion, and the text, but not the lemma of the epigram on the Anastasis[84].

Epigrams nos. 109–114 (and the epigram on the Crucifixion that is missing) were inscribed on the walls and the dome of the church of the Virgin of the Source, as indicated by the lemmata attached to them. The lemma attached to 110 even specifies where the epigram was situated in the church: εἰς τὸν τρoῦλλoν, "in the dome". The epigrams focus on the major liturgical feasts. They are epigrams on the pictures of the feast cycle. This particular church programme of decoration became popular in the middle Byzantine period. The earliest surviving examples date from the eleventh century. By good fortune, however, we have a few literary descriptions of church decorations demonstrating that the feast cycle was already introduced in Byzantine monumental art in the second half of the ninth century[85]. Although the twelve-feast cycle

[82] A. Kartsonis, Anastasis. The Making of an Image. Princeton 1986, 146–150.
[83] See chapter 3, pp. 89–90.
[84] See Stadtmüller 1894–1906: I, p. XVI.
[85] See the texts in: C. Mango, The Art of the Byzantine Empire. Englewood Cliffs 1972, 199–201 (the decoration of the church of the Holy Apostles dating from the reign of Basil I) and 203–205 (the church of Zaoutzas dating from 886–893).

appears to have been the standard iconographic formula, there are very few churches that have all twelve. Furthermore, there are considerable variations even in the selection of the twelve feasts that are depicted. Every church will have an Anastasis or a Crucifixion, but the inclusion of the Incredulity of Thomas, for instance, is merely an option[86]. Epigrams on the Great Feasts usually follow a purely chronological order: say, from the Annunciation to the Koimesis. This is not the case in *AP* I, 110–114, where we first have the Ascension, and then various scenes from the life of Christ before He ascended to heaven. The reason for this is obvious. Gregory of Kampsa, the epigrapher who collected these verse inscriptions, copied the epigrams in the exact order in which he first saw them. On entering the church he noticed the dedicatory verse inscription above the main gate or above the narthex entrance to the nave: no. 109. Inside the church, the magnificent cupola adorned with a mosaic of the Ascension was the first thing to attract his attention: no. 110. Only then did he turn his eyes to the mosaics on the walls of the church: the Crucifixion, the Anastasis, the Transfiguration, the Hypapante and the Chairete (nos. 111–114). It is not known whether Gregory of Kampsa copied all the verse inscriptions found in the church, nor whether the scribe of the Palatine manuscript omitted only the epigram on the Crucifixion. Since either of the two, the epigrapher or the scribe, may possibly have overlooked some vital evidence, we cannot be absolutely certain that the walls of the church were adorned only with these five major pictures of the Great Feasts. Nor can we establish on which walls the five pictures were to be found. In churches the chronological sequence of the pictures of the feast cycle is normally from the south-east to the north-east squinch of the *naos*, but there are so many exceptions to this rule that it is simply impossible to follow Gregory of Kampsa in every move he made. Did he first look at the northern church wall where he spotted the Crucifixion and the Anastasis, or were these two pictures in fact to be found at a different spot in the church? We simply do not know. But what we know for certain is that the order of the epigrams at *AP* I, 109–114 by and large corresponds to Gregory's first impressions. It is through his eyes that we decipher the original context of these epigrams.

The Anonymous Patrician (c. 940–970) is the author of a group of nine epigrams on various christological scenes: Transfiguration, Nativity, Hypapante, Baptism, Pentecost, Washing of Feet, Anastasis, Crucifixion and Descent from the Cross[87]. These pictures were in mosaic: παγχρυσομουσόστικτα

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[86] See E. Kitzinger, *Cahiers Archéologiques* 36 (1988) 51–73.

[87] The last three were edited by Lambros 1922: 49, 13 – 50, 6 (=L.) [unfortunately, with some errors, see the corrections by Mercati 1927: 416–417]; the first six were edited by Mercati 1927: 415, 7 – 416, 48 (=M.). The manuscript of the poems and epigrams of the Anonymous Patrician, Vat. Pal. gr. 367, quite often offers dubious readings and skips

(M. 415, 16), and had been donated by a certain Romanos Argyros who held the function of *kensor* (M. 415, 15–16; M. 416, 41–42; and L. 49, 16–17)[88]. Since later historical sources mention the existence of a monastery called μονὴ Ἀργυρῶν or τοῦ Ἀργυροπώλου, it seems likely that he donated these mosaics to the monastery that bore his name. The epigrams do not follow a strict chronological order: the Transfiguration should have been placed after the Baptism, and both the Anastasis and the Pentecost after the Descent from the Cross. This 'disorderliness' is caused by the same organic factors as the ones applying to the seemingly deviant decoration of the church of the Virgin of the Source. In monumental art the position of each of the pictures of the feast cycle is dictated by circumstantial architectonic factors, such as the size and the form of the church, the available space on the walls, the iconographical programme, and so forth. It is for this reason that authentic verse inscriptions, such as the epigrams by the Anonymous Patrician, do not follow the life of Christ step by step, but are arranged according to the architectonic design of the church in which they were to be found. The frequent use of verbs of perception and the addressing of the viewers in the second person leave no doubt that the epigrams on the decoration of the katholikon of the Argyros monastery served as verse inscriptions. See, for instance, the epigram on the Washing of Feet (M. 416, 43–48):

Ἄνθρωπε, φρῖξον οὐρανοῦ τὸν δεσπότην
πόδας μαθητῶν ἐκκαθαίροντα βλέπων,
καὶ πᾶσαν ὀφρῦν συγκατασπάσας κάτω
ἄνω πρόβαινε πρὸς πόλον τῷ μετρίῳ·
ὁδῶν γὰρ ὕψος ἐκδιδάσκων ὁ πλάσας
ἑκὼν βροτοῦται καὶ βροτῶν νίπτει πόδας.

"O man, tremble at the sight of the Lord of the Heavens cleansing the feet of His disciples! And having subdued all haughtiness ascend to heaven with humility! For (here) the Creator willingly becomes man and washes the feet of men, and thus shows the path that leads upward"[89]. The poet plays with the

words or even whole verses. It also misquotes the text of the epigram on the Baptism: M. 415, 17–20 should be placed before 415, 13–16; these two quatrains should not be separated, but form one poem (see καὶ in M. 415, 13, referring back to M. 415, 19); the following words should be added: ἄστρον γε (415, 17), χεὶρ νῦν (415, 18) and ἐκπλήττεται δὲ (415, 13); and the following emendations are necessary: τιμῶν (415, 15) and γράφει (415, 16).

[88] He is not the famous emperor by the same name: see Appendix IV, p. 323. Read in M. 416, 41: πίστις Ῥωμανοῦ (instead of πιστὸς Ῥωμανός, cf. the genitive forms in the next verse).

[89] I am not familiar with the adverbial use of τῷ μετρίῳ ("with moderation", "with temperance", "with humility"), instead of μετρίως or τὸ μέτριον.

words ἄνω and κάτω. Christ is called the Lord of the Heavens, who by His own volition became Man on Earth. He shows His humility by bending down and washing the feet of His disciples. This is an awesome spectacle to behold. It is also a sight that shows us the way. When the viewer looks at the image of the Washing of Feet and understands its message, he will know that haughtiness leads us nowhere. Only by way of humbling ourselves can we ascend to the Kingdom of Heavens. To go upward presupposes that we first go downward. The poet invites the viewers to participate in Christ's humility. By looking at the picture, probably from the ground level and thus with their faces turned upward, the viewers participate in the spectacle of heaven becoming earth and earth aspiring to become heaven. They become part of the picture.

The three epigram cycles on christological scenes by George of Pisidia, Ignatios Magistor and the Anonymous Patrician are of great relevance to art historians interested in the development of the iconography of New Testament scenes. The epigram cycle of Pisides still includes a number of Infancy scenes, a Miracle scene and a few other christological scenes that do not belong to the feast cycle. The epigram cycles of Ignatios Magistor and the Anonymous Patrician, however, concentrate on the venerated pictures of the feast cycle, which by the end of the ninth century, if not earlier, had begun to dominate the decoration of church walls in Byzantine monumental art. Although the sad remnants of Byzantine monumental art are not adorned with inscribed captions to the pictures of the feast cycle[90], these two epigram cycles leave no doubt that verse inscriptions on christological scenes once decorated the walls of Byzantine churches. The closest parallel to these inscribed epigram cycles can be found in two illuminated manuscripts. In ms. 3 of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, a twelfth-century Gospel book, we may admire seven splendid miniatures of the Great Feasts ranging from Nativity to Pentecost[91]. These miniatures bear captions in verse, such as, for instance, the text on the Crucifixion:

Ὢ φρικτὸν ἔργον, ὢ κατάπληκτος θέα·
Θεὸς δι' ἡμᾶς ὡς βροτὸς πάσχει ξύλῳ.

[90] Except for the (no longer existing) church of St. Stephen on the island of Nis in Lake Egridir, where in the early 1900s Rott spotted some *tituli* below the pictures of the feast cycle: H. Rott, Kleinasiatische Denkmäler aus Pisidien, Pamphylien, Kappadokien und Lykien. Leipzig 1908, 89. Of these texts he quoted only one caption. This caption is an epigram by Prodromos, see Lauxtermann 1999b: 369–370.

[91] See R.S. Nelson, Text and Image in a Byzantine Gospel Book in Istanbul (Ecumenical Patriarchate, cod. 3). New York 1978, and A. Paliouras, in: Τὸ οἰκουμενικὸ πατριαρχεῖο. Ἡ μεγάλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκκλησία. Athens 1989, 137–141 and figs. 119–134.

"O dreadful deed! O amazing sight! Because of us God suffers in the flesh on the cross"[92]. In an illuminated Syriac manuscript in Paris, ms. Bibl. Nat. Syriaque 355 (s. XII–XIII), we also find a number of epigrams written below the pictures of the Feasts of the Lord[93]. The epigram on the Entrance into Jerusalem, for instance, reads in translation: "This is the (divine) Majesty humbly sitting on the back of a donkey in Zion. The children welcome Him with hosannas, palm leaves and olive branches"[94].

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Preaching the Gospel

In the first book of the Palatine Anthology we find a long epigram cycle which dates from c. 600: see Appendix X, pp. 357–361. This epigram cycle, *AP* I, 37–49 and 52–77, can be divided into four parts: infancy of Christ (37–43), feast cycle (44–49 and 52–56), Old Testament iconography (57–73) and miracle scenes (74–77). It is difficult to establish what these epigrams actually describe. Pictures, of course, but what sort of pictures? Miniatures or wall paintings? It seems unlikely that the epigrams were inscribed on the pictures

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92 In Vindob. Iur. gr. 15 (s. XIV in.), fols. 163ᵛ–164ʳ, an epigram on the Passion of Christ, consisting of 8 lines, bears the same incipit: see Papagiannis 1997: I, 22 and G. Vassis, *Hell* 50 (2000) 163.

93 See J. Leroy, Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures conservés dans les bibliothèques d' Europe et d' Orient. Paris 1964, 268–280.

94 For ninth- and tenth-century illuminated manuscripts bearing captions in verse, see Appendix VIII, nos. 72–83. For later examples of miniatures with captions, see the following three illuminated Psalters: the Theodore Psalter (a. 1066) [see S. Der Nersessian, L' illustration des psautiers grecs du moyen âge. II. Londres Add. 19352. Paris 1970], ms. Brit. Mus. Add. 36928 (c. 1090) [see A. Cutler, The Aristocratic Psalters in Byzantium. Paris 1984, 48–49 and 167–178] and the Berlin Psalter (s. XI–XII) [see G. Stuhlfauth, *The Art Bulletin* 15 (1933) 311–326]. See also the epigrams on the miniatures of the Odes in ms. Dumb. Oaks 3 (s. XI) [S. Der Nersessian, *DOP* 19 (1965) 153–183 and Hörandner 1992: 114, n. 40], the monosticha on the miniatures of the twelfth-century Vatican Octateuch (and its copy, the Vatopedi Octateuch) [J. Lowden, *DOP* 36 (1982) 115–126: for instance, figs. 15 and 16], and the fourteenth-century Hippiatrica manuscript, Par. gr. 2244 [for instance, the miniature on fol. 54: στίχ(ος)· ὀρθοῦσιν οἶδε παραγωγὴν αὐχένος: see St. Lazaris, *Études Balcaniques* (Cahiers Pierre Belon) 2 (1995) 185, fig. 3]. For epigram cycles on small artefacts, see the Vatopedi reliquary of St. Demetrios [A. Xyngopoulos, *Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς* 1936, 101–136] and the ex-voto silver sheets re-used for the book cover of Brit. Mus. Add. 28815 [Ch. Walter, Studies in Byzantine Iconography. London 1977, nos. V and VI].

they describe. First of all, there are a number of doublets: epigrams dealing with the same iconographic scene (see nos. 37–40, 54–55 and 69–70). As works of art usually do not bear more than one verse inscription, it is reasonable to assume that these redundant doublets are simply epigrams that play with the literary conventions of the genre. Secondly, the highly individualistic character and the personal touch of many of the epigrams are not very appropriate for verse inscriptions. In many epigrams, especially those on the Old Testament, the lyrical subject of the epigrams participates actively in the scenes that are depicted. There is an "I" that intrudes into the pictorial scenes: an obtrusive "eye" gazing at the pictures and interpreting their message in a highly personal manner. The poet is emotionally involved in what he sees: for instance, "O Passion, O Cross, O Blood that dispels the passions, cleanse my soul from all wickedness" (no. 54) or "On the threshold of my soul is the redemptive blood of the Lamb. Away, pernicious Satan, come not near" (no. 57).

In many of the Old Testament epigrams the poet addresses us directly. Do we not understand what we see? Can we not grasp the meaning of the picture? It is a *τύπος*. It is a *prefiguration* of Christ's presence on earth – a faint shadow of what will only become manifestly clear in the New Testament. This is illustrated, for instance, by no. 65 (on Abraham): "Abraham takes his son to be sacrificed to God. Be merciful! What sacrifice does the mind see, of which this picture is a type?" The answer is, of course, the sacrifice of the Son of God. For another example, see no. 58 (on Gideon's Fleece): "First the fleece is moist and gives dew to the bowl, but then this very fleece is dry. Hide hidden things in your mind". Despite the cautious reminder not to reveal what the fleece stands for, most Byzantine readers will have immediately recognized its symbolic meaning: the immaculate virginity of the Mother of God. Typology is a commonplace hermeneutic stratagem of Byzantine theologians to explain away the sometimes unorthodox and, therefore, potentially subversive stories of the Old Testament. This is why epigrams on Old Testament scenes usually allude to the symbolic interpretations which became attached to its iconography over time. However, there are only a few epigrams as explicitly "typological" as the ones at *AP* I, 57–73. Time and again the poet invites the viewers to read the message of the Old Testament pictures symbolically, so often that when he finally returns to New Testament scenes, he warns them at no. 75 (on the Samaritan Woman) that here a symbolic interpretation is really not necessary: "No *type*, but a God and bridegroom here saves his Gentile bride, whom he saw beside the water".

Epigram no. 75 refers back to nos. 61 and 69–70, on the wife of Moses and on Rebecca, respectively. Like the Samaritan woman, Rebecca and Moses' wife are expressly identified as "Gentile brides". It is remarkable to see how often the poet uses the words ἔθνος and ἐθνικός or selects biblical figures of non-

Jewish extraction in the Old Testament epigrams. The subject of the Gentiles, the non-believers, is clearly of great concern to the poet. In a most unusual epigram he explains why this is the case: no. 63 (on Hagar)

> Ἐξ ἐθνῶν καὶ Ἄγαρ· τί δὲ ἄγγελος; ἢ τί τὸ ὕδωρ;
> ἐξ ἐθνῶν καὶ ἐγώ· τοὔνεκεν οἶδα τάδε.

"Hagar, too, is of the Gentiles. But what is the angel? Or what is the water? I, too, am of the Gentiles, therefore I know these things". The second verse comes as a great surprise. As far as I know, there are no other examples of Byzantine poets claiming to be one of the Gentiles. In a Christian context, this curious confession can mean only one thing: the poet was born into a family of pagans. Since he evidently was a true believer when he wrote this epigram, he had been converted to the Christian faith and had been baptized later in life. It is absolutely impossible to tell what form of religion he adhered to prior to his conversion. Was he a pagan pre-Islamic Arab (as the reference to Hagar possibly indicates), a Zoroastrian, one of the few heathens who still worshipped the ancient gods, a Manichaean or a Gnostic?

The epigram refers to the well-known story of Hagar, the slave of Sarah and concubine of Abraham, who, heavily pregnant, fled to a nearby water well because she could no longer stand the sly harassments of her jealous mistress. There the angel of God appeared to her and told her that she should return to her former servitude. He comforted her by saying that she would give birth to a son, Ishmael, untamed like a wild donkey and at odds with the rest of the world. Then she praised the Lord who had presented Himself to her: Σὺ ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἐπιδών με (in the Septuagint version, Gen. 16: 13), "you are the God that has watched over me". This phrase provides the answer to the rhetorical question the poet puts forward in the epigram: "What is the angel?" Since Hagar recognizes God himself in the messenger whom He sends, the answer can only be: God. But what about the water? "What is the water?" Once again, the answer is quite simple. In the New Testament the trinitarian God presented Himself in the water of the river Jordan, where He, that is to say: the Son in His hypostatic union with God the Father, was baptized while the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. The water is the water of Baptism. It is with this water that all those who belong to the Gentiles but are converted to Christianity, like the poet himself, are to be baptized. Once we understand the paramount importance of the concept of Baptism, we cannot fail to notice that "water", "dew", "fluids", "wells", "rivers", and the like, are crucial words in the vocabulary of our poet: see nos. 47, 53, 58–59, 61–64, 70, 72 and 74–76.

"Blood", "slaughter", "sacrifice", "bread", "wine", and the like, are also among the poet's favourite words: see nos. 43, 53–54, 57, 65–66, 72 and 76. All these words refer to the Eucharist. See, for instance, no. 53 (on Easter): "Christ abolished the Lamb of the Law and provided an immortal sacrifice, Himself

the priest and Himself the victim". The epigram describes a picture of the Last Supper and centres on the meaning of the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist. By His redemptive death on the Cross, by sacrificing Himself for the sake of fallen mankind, God has renewed the convenant with humanity. That is why the venerable Jewish custom of slaughtering lambs at Passover is no longer necessary. For Christ is the lamb of the new convenant. And Christ is also the high priest offering the self-sacrificing sacrifice to God. When He broke the bread -His body- and poured the wine -His blood- at the Last Supper, only a few days before He died on the Cross, the old became new again and bloody Passover turned into bloodless Easter. The famous king-priest Melchisedech is the Old Testament prefiguration of the Eucharist (no. 66): "Melchisedech, king and priest, when you offer bread and wine, what are you? A symbol of truth".

The water of Baptism and the blood of Redemption are the two fluids of salvation that streamed from the body of Christ when He was dying on the Cross. The poet wants us to take part in this divine mystery. He wants us to look at the pictures and discover their inner meaning, as he did when he was converted to Christianity. When he was baptized with the water, he was saved by the blood of Christ. Once a pagan, he now participates in the Eucharist that brings salvation. Can we share his vision with him? Are we willing to be converted to the majestic truth that he has discovered? He speaks to us in his epigrams. He addresses us directly. He asks us if we can see the light as he did.

These epigrams are without parallel in Byzantine poetry. Since later Byzantine poets address an audience of believers, there is no need to use the medium of poetry as a vehicle of missionary activities. There is no one left to be converted. True enough, there is no shortage of heretics, which is why so many Byzantine poems serve as dogmatic weapons directed against religious opponents, but that is not the same thing. Here we have an attempt to address the non-believers, whereas later Byzantine poetry lashes out against heterodox believers. The circle rapidly closes after c. 600. The "outsider" disappears from sight. And theological disputes become self-centred, addressing only the inner circle of believers. The main difference between the culture of Late Antiquity and that of medieval Byzantium, wherever precisely one would like to draw the line, is the definition of the "outsider". In Late Antiquity the cultural boundaries between "us" and the "others" are not yet clearly outlined, so that frequent contacts across the lines, interchange of ideas and crossovers from one side to another are still possible. The Byzantine world, however, is safely entrenched behind its own culturally and intellectually sterile demarcation lines of "ours" and "not ours".

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The Bible of Leo Sakellarios

In the 940s a senior official in the imperial administration, Leo Sakellarios, donated a two-volume illuminated manuscript of the Bible to a monastery of St. Nicholas which had been founded by his brother Constantine[95]. The second volume is no longer extant. The first volume contains Genesis through Psalms (plus the biblical Odes) and is adorned with several full-page miniatures. Epigrams are written on the frames of these miniatures. On fol. 1[v] there is an interesting editorial note about the purpose of these epigrams: "Please note that in each history, that is, on the historiated images of each history in the two volumes, metric iambic verses run around on the four sides of the frame explaining the meaning of the historiated scenes clearly and concisely"[96]. The text is difficult to translate because the scholiast plays with the ambiguous meaning of the words ἱστορία and ἱστορῶ. The books of the Old and the New Testaments form "histories" inasmuch as they recount the story of God's providence from the beginning of time to the establishment of early Christianity. The miniatures that serve as frontispiece to these books, form "histories" as well – "historiated images" encapsulating in well-chosen, significant vignettes the story of divine providence.

It is worth noticing that the first epigram, on the book of Genesis, focuses on the concept of time. There God is said to have made heaven and earth "timelessly" (ἀχρόνως), but to have created man "within time" (ὑπὸ χρόνον)[97]. Thus time starts with the creation of man, and all that follows afterwards in the Bible bears proof of God's unrelenting efforts to save mankind. In the second epigram, a book epigram on the whole Leo Bible, the poet makes much of the significance of the Incarnation for the salvation of mankind. The entire Bible, he writes, tells us the story of the Logos who is both God and Man and who "arranges all things for man's salvation as He alone knows"[98]. Look at the Old Testament, he says: the stories in it form prefigurations (ἐν τύπῳ) of what was only to become apparent after the Incarnation, and show how God was

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[95] For the identification of the donor and the date of the manuscript, see Mango 1969. For a thorough description of the manuscript and its miniatures, see: Die Bibel des Patricius Leo. Codex Reginensis Graecus I B. Einführung von S. Dufrenne & P. Canart. Zurich 1988.

[96] Δεῖ εἰδέναι ὅτι καὶ καθ' ἑκάστην ἱστορίαν ἤγουν εἰς τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς ἱστορηθείσας ἐν τοῖς δυσὶ βίβλοις ἐν ἑκάστῃ ἱστορίᾳ στίχοι ἔμμετροι ἰαμβικοὶ περίεισιν ἐν ταῖς τέσσαρσι γωνίαις τῶν περιφερίων (sic), τῶν ἱστορηθέντων νοῦν ἐν ἐπιτομῇ σαφέστατα δηλοῦντες (Mathews 1977: 99).

[97] Mathews 1977: 124. Read in v. 3 τοῦτον (not πόντον) referring back to τὸν χοῦν in v. 1 (=Adam).

[98] Mathews 1977: 124, vv. 12–13. Read in v. 12 λοιπόν (not λείπων). Also edited by Pitra 1864–68: I, 659. See also Olster 1994: 437–438.

always there, among His people, even when He had not yet manifested himself as clearly as He did in the person of Jesus Christ. The poet uses a rather unusual metaphor to indicate the presence of God throughout time. Before the Incarnation we have the εἴσοδοι, the "entrances" through which God manifested himself in the Old Testament. After the Incarnation we have the ἐκβάσεις – the "exits", the fulfillment of God's providential schemes[99]. The abstruse metaphor of God's "entrances" results from the poet's desire to show that God "came forth" (προῆλθε) in this world not on one, but on two occasions: not only when the Son was born, but also at the creation of man[100]. The whole Bible is a story of God's presence. This is aptly illustrated, as the poet informs us, by all the books of the Old and New Testaments. In his enumeration of these books the poet introduces each separate entry by the word οὕτω(ς), "likewise". What he means to say by the repetitive use of this word, is that all books together essentially tell the same story of how God provided for mankind, both before and after the Incarnation[101].

Thus we see that the editorial note at the beginning of the Leo Bible on the whole corresponds with the poet's interpretation of the biblical stories. To summarize: in the first two epigrams the poet writes that time began with the creation of man and that the Bible presents the story of God's providence and loving care for mankind. The poet views the relationship of God and man from a historical perspective. Although God's benevolence toward fallen mankind remains unaltered throughout (οὕτω, οὕτω, and once again οὕτω), the history of mankind, as presented by the Bible, evolves within time's brackets from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise to the glorious moment when Christ, by His redemptive death on the cross, reopened the gates of heaven for the new Adam and the new Eve. The historical dimension of God's providence splendidly accounts for the use of the words ἱστορία and ἱστορῶ in the editorial note. However, there still remains the problem of what these words mean exactly. Does the concluding sentence of the editorial note imply that the epigrams reveal "the meaning of the historiated scenes" (as I translated) or does it mean that they elaborate on "the meaning of the histories (that is, the books of the Bible)"? This is not an easy question to answer, especially as much research has

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[99] Mathews 1977: 124, vv. 1–15. The syntax of these verses is somewhat complicated. The object τὰς ἐκβάσεις in v. 5 repeats the object construction of vv. 1–3. The relative pronoun δι' ὧν in v. 10 refers back to the antecedent τὰς εἰσόδους in v. 6 (vv. 7–9 form an adverbial clause: "as Genesis (...) and the book of Deuteronomy teach us with great wisdom").

[100] See v. 10 (on God before the Incarnation) and vv. 32–34 (on God after the Incarnation).

[101] Mathews 1977: 124, vv. 16–39. The epigram concludes with Leo's dedication of the Bible to the Holy Virgin and St. Nicholas: vv. 41–60. As for v. 40, I can only repeat the words of Pitra 1864–68: I, 659: "Quid v. 40 sibi velit, me fugit".

yet to be done on late antique and Byzantine theological hermeneutics[102]. However, the frequent use of verbs of perception and words like "painter", "image" and "to depict" strongly suggests that the epigrams comment upon the miniatures themselves. The picture at the beginning of the book of Numbers, which shows the census taking of the twelve tribes of Israel, is also interesting. In this miniature Joshua plays a prominent role in the census, although the book of Numbers does not mention his presence. Since the epigram focuses on Joshua and the twelve tribes as prefigurations of Jesus and the twelve disciples, it is beyond doubt that the epigram does not refer to the book of Numbers, but to the miniature itself.

As there is no reliable edition of the epigrams of the Leo Bible, unfortunately it is impossible to reach a solid verdict on their literary quality. The syntax is often awkward, the prosody often incorrect, and the metrical structure often shaky, with numerous harsh enjambments, instances of hiatus, and neglect of stress regulation. But is the poet to blame, or the editor? For instance, on a photograph of the miniature on fol. 2ᵛ, I read ἐμφρόνῳ (not ἐμφρόνως), θεητόκῳ (not θεοτόκῳ) and προκρίτους (not προσκρίτους); the syntax, prosody and vocabulary of this particular epigram improve a great deal just by following the readings of the manuscript. However, it is only fair to admit that even with these corrections the epigram still presents a few unusual features: oxytone verse ending in v. 4 (θεῷ), postponed πλήν (ἐκ πίστεως πλήν, "but out of faith"), asyndeton: ἐσθλὸν εὐτελές, and the demotic plural of the third person: σπένδουν (cf. προγράφουν in the epigram on fol. 85ᵛ).

Let us look, once again, at the editorial note. It peremptorily states that the epigrams of the Leo Bible "explain the meaning of the historiated scenes (τῶν ἱστορηθέντων, the miniatures) clearly and concisely". "Concisely" (ἐν ἐπιτομῇ): the epigrams on the frames of the miniatures consist of four or six verses (with the exception of the one on fol. 2ᵛ: 7 vv.). "Clearly" (σαφέστατα): a somewhat exaggerated statement, seeing that a thorough schooling in biblical exegesis is undoubtedly a prerequisite for a complete understanding of the message of most epigrams. "Explaining the meaning (of the images)" (τῶν ἱστορηθέντων νοῦν … δηλοῦντες): this phrase is only partially true. There are quite a number of epigrams that explain how the poet (and presumably, also the donor, Leo Sakellarios, who had hired the poet) interpreted the visual message of the miniatures; but there are also epigrams that simply describe the scenes portrayed on the miniatures. These purely descriptive epigrams do not explain anything.

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[102] But see Olster 1994: 429–436 and 440–445, who discusses the historical development of theological hermeneutics as regards the figure of Moses, which in post-iconoclastic art led to a remarkable change in the iconography of the scene of Moses receiving the Law.

Purely descriptive, for instance, is the following epigram found next to the frontispiece of the book of Job:

Γυμνὸν τὸν Ἰώβ, σάρκας ἐκτετηκότα,
ἔδειξεν ἡμῖν ὁ γραφεὺς ἕλκους πλέων·
οἶκτον γὰρ ἔσχεν οὐδαμῶς πολυστόνου,
ἀνδρὸς πόνους δ' ὕφηνε κἀν ταῖς εἰκόσι[103].

"Here we see Job naked, his body emaciated and full of festering wounds, as the painter represented him; for he did not pity at all the much troubled one, but even wove the sufferings of this man into the image". This epigram does not offer an interpretation of the image. At best it may be said that the epigram implicitly suggests that the viewer has to feel compassion when he looks at the miniature depicting the sufferings of Job. The implicit injunction to pity poor Job may perhaps orchestrate the appropriate viewer response to the image, but it does by no means constitute an explanation of its visual message.

There are many epigrams, however, that do provide a theological interpretation of the miniatures. This theological interpretation always involves a symbolic reading of the Old Testament stories in the light of the revelation of the New Testament. In these interpretative epigrams there is an intricate play of metaphors, symbols and analogies, which, as in a dark mirror, reflect the immanent truth of Christianity. See, for instance, the epigram on the book of Judith:

Σκόπει τὸ λύτρον καὶ ξενίζου τὸν τύπον·
θῆλυ ξίφος γὰρ ὧδε καὶ Θεοῦ σθένος
τῷ Ἰσραὴλ τίθησι τὴν σωτηρίαν·
ἐκ θήλεως αὖθις δὲ Θεοῦ Σοφία
Χριστὸς προῆλθε σταυρὸν ὡς ξίφος φέρων,
δι' οὗ Σατὰν καθεῖλε τὴν πανοπλίαν[104].

"See the redemption and marvel at the prefiguration, for here a female sword and God's might bring salvation to Israel. It was from a woman, too, that the Wisdom of God, Christ, came forth bearing the cross as a sword, by which He subdued the panoply of Satan". In this epigram the sword by which

[103] Mathews 1977: 132 (fol. 461v). Mathews reads καν ταῖς εἴκοσι and translates "twentyfold" (sic). The form ἐκτετηκότας (v. 1) is grammatically incorrect: not only is σάρξ a feminine noun, but because of γυμνόν and πλέων an acc. sing. is required. For a more correct edition, see Hörandner 1991: 420.

[104] Mathews 1977: 132 (fol. 383v). Mathews reads σκοπεῖ in v. 1. The ungrammatical form θήλεως (instead of θήλεος) should be retained *metri causa*.

Judith killed Holophernes is compared to the sword of Christ, who, born of a woman, died on the cross and by His death on the cross (his sword) annihilated the power of Satan. The point of comparison, femininity, is rather far-fetched: Israel was saved by a "female sword" and mankind was saved by the cross of Him who "came forth from a woman"[105]. As Christianity looks upon women as feeble creatures, the potentially dangerous concept of female courage is neutralized by presenting Judith merely as an instrument of God – a female sword of which He makes use. Likewise, the Holy Virgin's contribution to the salvation of man is reduced to the act of giving birth to Christ. Christ is one hundred percent male, of course, but in the epigram He appears in "feminine" form as the Wisdom of God (Θεοῦ Σοφία). The poet hereby implicitly suggests, I would say, that in the story of Judith it is the feminine side of masculinity that liberates and brings salvation. As Judith's female strength is merely a reflection of the masculine might of God, the epigram reads as a playful, but hardly subversive inversion of traditional gender roles. She is he.

The epigram on Judith is not directly related to the actual physical appearance of the miniature, which shows her leaving her home town, going to the camp of the enemy and killing drunken Holophernes in his tent, and which also depicts the final stage of this biblical historiette: the victory of the Israelites. Only verses 2 and 3 to some extent correspond to the image: θῆλυ ξίφος refers to the representation of Judith clutching Holophernes by the hair and swaying a bloodstained sword, and the σωτηρία of Israel alludes to the combat scene in which the Israelites are clearly winning. With the word σωτηρία, however, the poet already moves away from pure description and introduces an element of interpretation. The Israelites do not simply win a crushing victory over their enemies, but obtain spiritual salvation. In the first verse the viewer is already exhorted to interpret the image as a τύπος and to read it as a story of redemption (λύτρον). Through this symbolic reading of the visual message, spelt out in great detail in the epigram, the poet guides the viewer through the maze of biblical exegesis and instructs him how he is to look at the image. The sword is the cross of Christ, Judith resembles the Holy Virgin, the victory in combat amounts to spiritual salvation, and the enemy is the panoply of Satan.

Thus the epigram presents a symbolic interpretation of the image. It can hardly be said to describe the actual miniature. The words of the epigram do not have any bearing on what the image expresses in its composition, forms, lines and palette. But then again, why should the poet have to be so obtuse as to try and convey in words what the painter so admirably expressed in paint?

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[105] Cf. Luke 2: 25–35, the prophetical speech of Symeon when he sees the Child in the Temple. In verse 35 he tells Mary: καὶ σοῦ αὐτῆς τὴν ψυχὴν διελεύσεται ῥομφαία – which probably refers to the grief she will feel when her Son dies on the cross.

Words and images are two entirely separate forms of language, which both have a semiotic relationship to reality, but communicate through different media. Of course, this does by no means exclude the possibility that visual and verbal forms of imagination may correspond to a certain degree and may influence each other. But whatever mutual influence the two may have on one another, it is never a straightforward one-on-one relation. The poet of the epigrams in the Leo Bible provides tools to decode and to read the visual message of the miniatures in a symbolic manner. His interpretation does not necessarily agree with the intentions of the painter – but the painter's intentions are totally irrelevant to the hermeneutic problems posed by the epigrams. We should not confuse painter and poet, art and poetry. The epigrams of the Leo Bible merely tell us how an individual in the 940s looked at the miniatures and what he read, or thought he read, in their visual signs and pictorial language. They also tell us how the poet wanted others to look at the images, for the frequent use of the imperative ("see!", "marvel at … !") naturally presupposes that he assumes that future users of the Leo Bible will follow his lead. Therefore, the great significance of these epigrams is not so much a question of what they have to say about the miniatures themselves, but what they reveal about Byzantine attitudes in the tenth century toward the visual world of the arts. The epigrams provide a unique opportunity to view tenth-century miniatures through a Byzantine looking-glass and to understand how Byzantine viewers responded to contemporary forms of art.